



Author Saitosa
Illustrator Tsugutoku

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Overpowered,
AND OVER IT!





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Side Story 1

“Ugh... Kill me now...”

It was obvious from his extremely pessimistic statement that the guy in front of me, Masayoshi Date, was down in the dumps. We were currently in a carriage, leaving the Rising Sun Kingdom. It was rather cramped, so I would’ve liked it if he had kept his negative energy to himself. A day had passed since the party and his little dungeon duel. But, apparently, he hadn’t gotten over it yet. I exhaled, and then spoke up.

“Would you, like...cheer up already?”

He slowly raised his head to look at me. “Shut it, washboard.”

“Huh?!”

Here I was, trying to comfort him, and what did I get for my troubles? An insult. How dare he! I’d never forgive him for as long as I lived. However, I had a big heart. There was more than enough room in there for me to accept an immature guy who kept running his mouth off.

“Listen—flat is justice.” As soon as the words left my mouth, however, I felt like I’d shot myself in the foot. How pathetic was it for *me* to be the one saying that?

Date looked right at me, then dropped his gaze. “Heh.” He snorted with laughter. Meanwhile, my patience was really wearing thin. *Screw you, blonde!* I was ready to kill a man. *Done relieving yourself? Said your prayers, wise guy? You ready to beg for your life while cowering in the corner of this carriage?*

“Aida... Easy there,” mumbled Tanaka, a quiet guy with messy hair, as he held me back. *And what the hell do you mean, “Easy there”? I’m not some kind of animal!*

“You should lighten up too, Date.”

“Hmph. Neither of you gets what I’m goin’ through.”

“All you’re bothered about is looking ‘uncool.’ There’s nothing to get,” I quipped reflexively. And it’s not like I was wrong. After all, he was the one getting down on himself for making himself look stupid with all that duel stuff. He was the one who’d wanted the duel in the first place, making all that fuss about being a hero, and now he was pissed about how uncool it had made him look. What a freakin’ narcissist.

“Okay, sure, you may have been twice as arrogant as usual, but

that's pretty much par for the course with you."

"Nah. I'm always cool." He said these words with neither a hint of hesitation nor irony. He deserved an award for being able to say that with a straight face.

It'd been a week since we were summoned to be heroes, which meant it'd been a week since the three of us started our lives here together. Out of the three of us, I felt like Masayoshi Date stood out the most because his name meant "justice in name alone," which I felt both did and didn't match him. In my mind, he wasn't nearly as much an ally of justice as he seemed to think he was. All the same, both Yuichi Tanaka and I had been saved by this guy.

It had happened on the third day after we'd been summoned to the Republic of Ghrantze. The people there didn't think very much of us. Historically, the republic had been summoning heroes just to suck up to the Maccad Empire. In other words, the citizens of the republic only begrudgingly accepted our presence.

They didn't ask for us to be summoned. There was nothing they wanted from us. We were simply a nuisance. I'd like to take a moment to point out, however, that their feelings towards us were completely unjustified, because it's not like *we'd* asked to be summoned either. How did they think *we* felt about the situation?

Of course, they couldn't mistreat us either or they'd earn the ire of the very Maccad Empire they were trying to kowtow to. As a result, we were treated more or less fairly, and received a minimal but nonzero amount of support.

Upon being summoned, the three of us were each granted a Divine Blessing...which was just a fancy word for "cheat." Date was granted Swordsmanship, mine was Light Magic, and Tanaka had Note.

Having the most battle-ready ability made Date the favorite of the republic, because the greater the contribution of a hero to the fight against the demon king, the more rewards their country would receive from the Maccad Empire. Additionally, it was just always a good thing to have a powerful ally. In light of all this, it was only natural that they treated him so well.

From what I'd heard, Tanaka's Divine Blessing was "aberrant." There were no records of his Divine Blessing in any other heroes, present and past. If there had been someone with a similar ability, that might have provided a clue as to how it worked. Also, it was typical for heroes to instinctively understand the nature of their Divine Blessing and how to use it. However, people with aberrant Divine Blessings would only receive that understanding in an epiphany at some undetermined time.

It was impossible to predict when that would happen, and there

were some who never understood their Divine Blessing even up till the day they died. On top of that, the aberrant Divine Blessings were *never* strong. They were either useless in combat or so finicky that they were hard to use properly. Because his power was certain to be of no use in battle, Tanaka was not treated well.

In comparison, my Divine Blessing—Light Magic—was much more useful. It was pretty self-explanatory—I could use light magic at will. But because my magic was geared more towards healing, I didn't get any special treatment from the republic.

To be clear, Light Magic wasn't *just* about healing. You could also use Light Magic to attack—for example, by shooting arrows made of light. I was also able to do stuff like that, but because of my personality, I just had more of an affinity with healing magic. There wasn't much I could do about it—that's just how I was.

Not to toot my own horn or anything, but I genuinely believed in the necessity of healing magic. I had no doubt that the tide of a battle could be turned by a healer of my caliber. Somehow, though, the people in this stupid country couldn't get that through their thick skulls. Now ain't that something?

At any rate, that's how we ended up with a huge disparity in how Date was treated and how we were treated. I wasn't happy about it, but with Tanaka being shy and not very assertive, and me not being much help in a fight, we had no choice but to yield to the strength of the republic's order of knights. Plus, Date was head over heels for the priestess that had summoned us. As much as that made me want to ask about his fidelity to the goddess, I refrained.

Things got worse on our third day in the republic. Their harsh treatment of us was even more blatant. They picked on us, belittled us, and pretty much just fed us scraps. They even hurt us. At this point, Date finally realized how we were being treated and brought it up to the priestess and the other higher-ups of the republic.

"You must understand—they are not suited to battle. Making them fight would be the same as sending them to be slaughtered. That would be a tragedy. If we were to treat them well, it would give them the obligation to fight. In order to avoid this, they must not be afforded any luxuries. There's little that can be done about this," the priestess had argued.

What a load of crap. Every last one of them was in on this horrible treatment. The priestess loathed me especially because I was an otherworlder who used Light Magic, which was the magic of their god. *You were the one who summoned me, though!* Not to mention she'd been blackhearted enough to have said something to Date that he could misconstrue as coming on to him, just to manipulate him. *Oh, by the way, the priestess's name is Lily.*

“Lily, do you really think that violence is unavoidable? Isn’t that messed up?”

“I will forever keep them in my thoughts. However, there are those in this world who are even more unfortunate. You must keep your eyes forward, my lord. You must march on, in order to save this world with your justice.”

“I ain’t interested in your pretty words. I wanna know if that’s what *you* think.”

At that moment, everyone present could sense that Date’s attitude had changed.

“Y-Yes... After all, you’re—”

“Got it. So that’s your answer, huh? Then I’ve got no doubts left.” A wry smile spread across Date’s face as he drew his training sword from its sheath.

“Wh-Why are you drawing your blade?!”

“This inequality makes me sick. But I’d never attack someone who’s unarmed for any reason, no matter what kind of mental gymnastics I end up doing. That’s not justice. It’s uncool.” Date approached Lily, but knights moved to stand between them.

“You may be a hero, but you must know that retaliation can be either just or unjust.”

“Move. You’re in my way. Also, shut the hell up about justice. *Everything* I do is just.”

“Halt! One more step and—” Lily tried in desperation to stop him, but he ignored her completely, continuing his advance.

When he finally came close enough to actually threaten her, the knights drew their swords and surrounded him.

I finally spoke up. “What are you doing, you idiot?!”

No matter how skilled he was with a blade, there was no way that he could take on knights who were armed with real swords. Especially not when there were over twenty of them around him, wearing magic armor to boot. That armor put them in a different league. Challenging them with a training sword was nothing short of reckless.

“You may have grown stronger, but you’ve also grown overconfident. Look at your surroundings first and assess your situation. We’ve seen you use Swordsmanship, but even with it, you are no match for our numbers,” the knight commander warned Date through a grin.

Even so, Date did not stop his advance. He didn’t hesitate for a second. If anything, his smile grew even more ferocious.

“I’ve grown overconfident? Don’t get cocky just ‘cause you’ve got a numbers advantage. Looks like I need to teach all of you your place.”

“You impudent little—” The knight commander flew into a fit of

rage.

“Stop!” I screamed in desperation. I wasn’t used to these kinds of situations. I was scared.

“Also...” As the knight commander rushed him, Date went on. “Who said I’ve ever used my Divine Blessing?”

It was the Date show after that. It was pretty simple. Since coming to this world, he hadn’t used his Divine Blessing once. He’d only been using the skills he already had, and with those, he was strong enough to take on five knights by himself. Actually using his Divine Blessing would only amplify his abilities. As I watched the scene unfolding before me, a single word came to mind: domination.

He deflected the swords of the knights as they came at him, then counterattacked by striking very precisely between the gaps of their armor, rendering them unconscious. If they charged him, their attacks were parried, and they were knocked off their feet. If they used magic, he evaded their spells.

His swordplay could not be described as beautiful, not even by an amateur. It was unrefined and lacked grace, almost barbaric—but also polished and incredibly accurate. It was an efficient sword style, entirely focused on slaying one’s opponents. Forget about being beautiful—it was so brutal it made me want to look away.

After a few minutes had passed, Date was unscathed—and as for the knights, none of them were left standing. He walked over to Lily, who was cowering in a corner, and stomped the wall right beside her head.

“Eek!” she screamed.

After becoming heroes, our physical abilities had grown to superhuman levels. His kick was strong enough that it cracked the wall.

“Listen up. We’re heroes. You summoned us here and asked for our help. We’re risking our lives to fight the demon king.” He glared right into her eyes. “If you’re asking us for a favor, you better treat us right. Even kids get that. Understand?”

Lily could only shrink back against the wall, trembling. There was nowhere for her to run. At her reaction, he pounded his foot into the same spot on the wall.

“Eek!” she screamed again. Her face grew pale, and she looked like she was on the verge of tears. Moisture was leaking from her skirt—an incredibly unbecoming situation for someone of her status.

There was another explosive sound as Date kicked the wall once more. The crack grew larger. Lily was completely speechless.

“I asked you a question. *Understand?*”

Like a bobblehead, Lily nodded.

“Fine. Whatever.” Done leering at her, Date turned back to us. “Huh? What’s the matter, you two?” he asked, as we recoiled from him.

Tanaka was so scared he couldn’t even move. All he did was tremble. I was scared too, but at the same time, I desperately wanted to make some kind of comment on how he’d claimed he wouldn’t attack an unarmed person, yet was fine inflicting this kind of psychological damage on them. He was totally acting like a yakuza. Unfortunately, I couldn’t get the words out of my throat.

At any rate, Date had really saved us back then. We eventually also learned that he *did* have something to do with the yakuza. Before this incident, that would’ve surprised us, but now we accepted it easily.

The carriage creaked as it rolled down the road. The bumpiness wrenched me out of my thoughts of the past and back into the present.

“Something happen?” the guard asked the carriage driver.

“A kid suddenly jumped out of nowhere.”

“A kid?” *Here in the mountains?* But then I recalled the village we had seen coming up here. We exited the carriage, and, about ten meters ahead of us, we spotted the figure of a kid.

“A girl?” Tanaka asked quietly.

It was just as he’d said. She looked to be about ten or so years old, with silver hair and red eyes. Her clothes were tattered and torn, and there was a small horn growing out of her head. No sooner had we noticed that surprising fact when we heard a rustling from the thicket, and two guys emerged.

“Finally. You saved us the trouble.”

“You little thief!”

The two men hadn’t seemed to notice us and closed in on the girl. Both of them were carrying axes that rested against their shoulders. It was very clear they weren’t playing around.

“The hell you two doin’?” Date barked, stopping the two men in their tracks.

“Who the hell...? None of your damn business,” one of the men snapped, finally noticing us.

“Like hell it’s not. What’re you gonna do to her?”

“What does that have to do with *you*?” The man glared back. It was a staring contest between thugs.

“Everything. If you’re tryin’ to hurt her, you’d better think twice about it.”

“What—you know her?”

“Nope.”

The man was incredibly confused by Date's answer. "Then what's your problem? You some kinda... 'ally of justice,' or somethin'?"

"What's it to you if I am?"

The other man spoke up. "If you're fightin' for justice, then you oughta know—we're justified in what we're doin'."

"Yeah! This kid stole from our shop! So she's gotta pay the price."

Upon closer inspection, it certainly did seem as though the girl was carrying an apple in her arms.

"Pay the price?"

"Normally, we'd kill her...but we'll settle for an arm or two."

The girl let out a silent scream, clutching her arms.

"All that for a measly apple? That's dumb."

"Hmph. I'm sure a rich boy like you wouldn't understand, but apples are scarce here. Just one of 'em goes for a high price. Plus, this ain't her first time. She's stolen from us over and over. She's gotta learn her lesson...and it's gotta *hurt*."

"And it ain't like she's human. She's a demon. There's no need for us to hold back."

He was right about that much—the horns on her head were proof enough.

"Hey, Date," I said to him. "I think they're in the right about this. If she's a demon, there's no need to stick your neck out for her."

"Huh? What the hell?"

"I-I agree. She's a thief. She committed a crime." Before Date could protest any further, Tanaka agreed with me.

If she were human, I might've tried to save her, but she was a demon—in other words, our enemy. Her horns made me sick to my stomach. In my mind, there was nothing wrong with killing her right here and now. Taking her arms but leaving her with her life was a kindness. Despite having scary faces, these guys were surprisingly kind. Were they trying to go for gap appeal?

The two men nodded at our words.

"Now that's settled...git outta here."

"Mmngh!"

"This brat's annoying. Shut her up!"

"Come on, Date, let's get back into the carriage." I tried to usher him away so we could leave, but he didn't budge. He looked as though he wanted to say something to us, but didn't. Instead, he turned back to them. In the next instant, he had placed himself between the girl and the men.

"D-Date?!"

"Huh? Outta the way!"

"No. This is justice."

"Justice?! Nah—that's us. Everyone here agrees!"

The other guy nodded, the carriage driver nodded, the guard nodded, Tanaka nodded, and so did I. The two guys might've had crappy attitudes, scary faces, and been vulgar barbarians...but they weren't wrong. If anything, Date was in the wrong for protecting a demon girl.

"We ain't exactly loaded. Even a single apple is a huge loss for us. If you're really on the side of justice, you should be on *our* side."

"God... Shut the hell up already."

But even in this situation, Date smiled fearlessly. I'd almost forgotten what kind of guy he was. Even if everyone was against him, he'd execute his form of justice.

"You're not layin' a hand on her. I don't care about your circumstances. I don't care what reasons or justifications you have. Gangin' up on an unarmed girl isn't justice. It's *uncool*."

He wasn't interested in what other people considered justice. And no matter what other people said, he wouldn't betray his own justice.

"Watch it or you're gonna get hurt, hypocrite."

"Whatever." Slowly, Date unsheathed his blade. "My justice isn't just for show. Anyone who wants a taste of it, step right up. I'll cut you down," Date declared.

He was prepared to enforce his idea of justice for the simple reason that it was cool. Masayoshi Date was not one to ever turn his back on his justice.

"So what do we do with the kid?"

As expected, Date beat the two guys to a pulp, and now the demon girl was in our carriage.

"Demons aren't allowed in the country, right? We'll hide her horn and I'll take her in."

"Wh-What?!" The guard raised his voice in shock.

I don't blame him for that reaction. Date taking in a demon was the same as the republic itself sheltering a demon.

"Chill. I'll watch over her. Not gonna let anythin' stupid happen."

"B-But—"

"What? You still bitchin' to *me*? A *hero*?"

"Eek!"

Suddenly, I flashed back to that scene of him beating all those knights...and I'm guessing the same thing happened to the guard. It had also traumatized all the nobles. Just him saying the words "I'm a hero" was enough to send them into a dissociative state. The guard had fallen silent at this point, but there was something that I wanted to ask.

"*Can* you take care of a little girl? I doubt anyone's gonna wanna help you. Plus, she doesn't trust anyone but you."

Ever since Date had saved her, she'd been glued to his side. If anyone else came close, she'd hide behind him.

"I'll do my best. Just give me some advice."

I let out a heavy sigh. Once again, I found myself forced into a really annoying situation. The worst part was that I was the type of person who couldn't refuse people's requests.

"What's your name?" he asked, looking straight at the girl.

Can she understand us? She hasn't said a word this entire time. Can she even talk?

"Richu..."

Oh, she can talk.

"Richu? That's short and easy to remember. It's a good name," Date said, patting her head.

Is that a compliment? But the girl closed her eyes, enjoying the hand on her head. Then she looked up at him.

"Thank...you," she said with a smile.

"Hm? Sure..."

"I hadn't...thanked you yet."

Her smile was adorable, but it was apparently even more effective on the unsuspecting Date. His face went slack.

"S-So cute..."

Oh god, here we go again. He'd fallen for her. He fell for people so easily. He'd fallen for the goddess, for Lily, and now for this little demon girl. This had to be some form of infidelity. Girls needed to stay away from him. He might've been kinda good looking, but still. I made a mental note to put him on my dating blacklist. He kinda scared me sometimes, but in the end, he was a harmless, simple idiot who fell in love really easily.

I'll save for another day the story of how, upon our return to the republic the next day, we discovered that Lily had awakened to masochism... A day a long, *long* time from now.

Side Story 2

“Wake up, Inori.”

“It was early morning, and a gentle voice woke me from my sleep. The first thing I saw when I opened my eyes was her smile, and the first thing I heard was a line that I’d heard many times before. It was almost nostalgic. Almost funny. I chuckled. Back then, every day was boring, but at least they were days of peace and happiness. Now, that was but a single page in our story. Even if the life we’d known had fallen apart, I was still so happy to have her by my side. The peaceful life we’d once known was now just a footnote in the life that lay ahead of us. There may come a day when we look back on our time spent together now and think of it as a happy period of our lives. Would she still be by my side then? At the very least, there was one thing I was sure of: if the life we knew once again fell apart, I’d be there to rescue her. With that thought, I shut my eyes again, a new determination filling my chest.”

“...Inori?”

I stayed silent.

“Would you mind not trying to tie everything up neatly with some random monologue?”

“Zzzz.”

“Stop sleeping!”

Sheesh, pipe down. “Why do you keep your master from sleep, whore?”

“Isn’t that kinda harsh?!”

Your shrill voice is the only thing that’s harsh. Detect enhanced my hearing to superhuman levels, so her voice was especially grating on my ears. Oh, also—rest assured that we hadn’t done anything naughty yet.

“It’s morning! Actually—it’s almost noon! Wake up already!”

“You say that, but I *just* started sleeping. If anything, there’s something wrong with *you*. Aren’t you a vampire?”

Even though I’m the one who made her a vampire, I’m starting to have my doubts. She was apparently a different kind of vampire from me. Her stats weren’t reduced to a tenth of their nighttime values in the day. She might have been one of those so-called daywalkers? I couldn’t have been more jealous. Not to mention, her stats had also grown ten times their original values from before her transformation.

What the actual fuck?

“You may have gone to bed early, but I stayed up all night studying. So go train by yourself.”

“You were just reading books! You call that studying? Sure, I’ve gained a fair few Skills and bits of knowledge from you, but it’d be best to experiment with your guidance. All I’m asking is for you to stay near me.”

“Ugh...”

Even after all the reading I’d done yesterday, I still had no clue what most of my Skills did. There wasn’t an immediate need for me to understand all of them, but after talking with her, I felt more awake. At this point, going back to sleep would be more of a pain.

“Fine. You owe me.” I got up and left the hut with Ariya. By the way, I’d made the hut with Armament Craft. It cost me a lot of MP. *Hm? A hut isn’t a weapon, you say? Well, it might look like a dilapidated hut, but it’s actually a fortress.* It was equipped with a large range of different and dangerous functions. A fortress wasn’t exactly an armament...but I’d made it with Armament Craft, so whatever. I was just gonna run with it.

“Urgh, I’m still having trouble getting used to flying.”

Ariya was currently practicing flying. She’d need a lot of time to master the use of the wings she’d only recently grown. She needed more time particularly because she couldn’t get Skills on her own. Apparently, becoming a vampire had bestowed her with various different Skills, but she wasn’t able to level them up or gain new ones. It made sense since she was from this world, while her vampirism, as well as its related Skills, were from another.

Also, after becoming my underling, her affinity with dark magic had increased. I’d read that most mages in this world only had two different affinities. In most cases, one affinity would be stronger than the other, and usually they’d be on opposite ends of the elemental spectrum. For instance, if someone had an affinity for fire magic, they’d gain an affinity for water magic too. Apparently, this kept the body’s mana in balance or something. *What does that even mean?* Could having an affinity for water magic prevent the user from getting hurt when using fire magic? It made no sense to me, particularly since I couldn’t use any magic from this world.

When Ariya was still human, she’d had four affinities: light, dark, wind, and earth. Among those four, light and wind were her strongest, while dark was basically an afterthought. But now it had become about as strong as her light magic. This might have been because of my True Dark Magic, though given that the dark magic of this world and the dark magic that I knew were completely different, I wasn’t

sure how likely that was.

The dark magic of this world could be used to cast curses, blind people, and debilitate a target. It was magic that was very effective against living things. My dark magic, on the other hand, was focused on nonliving things. They were completely different.

For the record, though, I think that Ariya became a daywalker because of her affinity for light magic. Either way, while she's practicing her flying, I should laugh at...I mean, review my Skills. *Let's look at what we've got.*

Inori Takafuji / Demon (Vampire – Baron-Class) / Lv. 14

HP: 3782/3782 / MP: 22037/22037

STR: 4133 / VIT: 3661 / DEX: 3417

AGI: 4325 / INT: 5975

Unique Skills: [Growth Boost] [5x Exp Multiplier] [½ Required Exp] [Eye of True Sight] [Eye of Sigils]

[Contempt for the Sun God] [Vampirism]

[Baron-Class Authority] [Skill Pilfer] [True Dark

Magic] [Armament Craft] [Detect] [Level Up] [Skill

Acquisition] [Monarch Caliber] [Martial Arts Master]

General Skills: [Swordsmanship Lv. 7] [Stealth Lv.

7] [Throwing Arts Lv. 8] [Dagger Arts Lv. 6]

[Dropkick Lv. 10] [Swindler Lv. 7] [Trap Removal Lv.

4] [Flight Lv. 5] [Trapper Lv. 4] [Bite Lv. 10]

[Leap Lv. 10] [Evasion Lv. 8] [Poise Lv. 7] [String

Arts Lv. 6] [Archery Lv. 3] [Jo Mastery Lv. 1]

[Hand-to-Hand Combat Lv. 2] [Bludgeoning Arts Lv. 1]

[Shield Arts Lv. 4] [Katana Arts Lv. 1] [Spear Arts

Lv. 4] [Marksman Lv. 1] [Fire Magic Lv. 1] [Water

Magic Lv. 1] [Wind Magic Lv. 1] [Earth Magic Lv. 1]

[Light Magic Lv. 1] [Dark Magic Lv. 1] [Mana

Manipulation Lv. 1] [Armor Arts Lv. 1] [Stance Arts

Lv. 1] [Assassination Arts Lv. 4] [Hidden Blade Lv.

1] [Cooking Lv. 3] [Cleaning Lv. 3] [Laundry Lv. 2]

[Transportation Lv. 2] [Sewing Lv. 3] [Hospitality

Lv. 2] [Merchant Lv. 3] [Mental Math Lv. 2]

[Memorization Lv. 3] [Nursing Lv. 2] [Strategist Lv.

2] [Penmanship Lv. 2] [Speedwriting Lv. 1]

[Agriculture Lv. 1] [Parallel Thinking Lv. 2] [Speed

Reader Lv. 1] [Sleight of Hand Lv. 1] [Drunken Rage

Lv. 1] [Sexual Prowess Lv. 1] [Thought Acceleration

Lv. 2] [Spatial Awareness Lv. 1] [Party Tricks Lv.

1] [Pen Spinning Lv. 1] [Tabletop Gaming Lv. 1]

[Gambling Lv. 1] [Great Fortune Lv. 1] [Misfortune Lv. 1] [Bad Luck with Women Lv. 1] [Painter Lv. 1] [Musician Lv. 2] [Architect Lv. 3] [Singer Lv. 2] [Dancer Lv. 4] [Court Etiquette Lv. 2] [Poker Face Lv. 3] [Side-to-Side Hopping Lv. 1] [Blink Step Lv. 1] [Quickdraw Lv. 1] [Dual Wielding Lv. 1] [Bondage Lv. 1] [Flirting Lv. 1] [Wink Lv. 1] [Fake Laughing Lv. 1] [Self-control Lv. 1] [Fear Resistance Lv. 1] [Pain Resistance Lv. 1] [Poison Resistance Lv. 2] [Charm Resistance Lv. 1] [Heat Resistance Lv. 1] [Physical Resistance Lv. 1] [Cold Resistance Lv. 1] Titles: Indomitable Soul, Involved Against Will, Ham Actor, Giant Killer, Scum of the Earth, Skill Collector, Assassin, Annihilator, Ruthless

Yeah... This was a mess. Skill Pilfer had stolen a Skill from every person I'd slain, the thing that they were best at while they were still alive. With that in mind, let's go through everything.

Everything from Swordsmanship to String Arts had gone up a little in levels, but they were still the same Skills I knew. Everything after that was uncharted territory.

Archery, Jo Mastery, Hand-to-Hand Combat, Bludgeoning Arts, Shield Arts, Katana Arts, Spear Arts, and Marksman were Skills that I'd gotten from some of the soldiers. It wasn't surprising that the levels of both Shield Arts and Spear Arts were raised, with how much the soldiers used those weapons.

Fire Magic, Water Magic, Wind Magic, Earth Magic, Light Magic, and Dark Magic were probably Skills that I had gotten from the mages among the knights. It was weird that they were all at level 1, though.

Mana Manipulation... Wait, did that mean that I could use magic tools now?

Armor Arts gave me pause, because—what did that even mean? What did it do? Could you move more easily while wearing armor? Hm, maybe.

Stance Arts... I had absolutely no clue. Way too obscure.

The fact that I'd gotten Assassination Arts and Hidden Blade meant that there'd probably been an assassin or two in the castle. *Interesting...*

Cooking, Cleaning, and Laundry had probably come from the servants.

Sewing, Hospitality, Merchant, Mental Math, Memorization, Nursing, Strategist, Penmanship, and Speedwriting had probably come from nobles. I vaguely remembered a strategist or something, but judging by the level that the Skill was at, there had to have been more

than one of them. *How can strategizing be someone's best Skill?*

Agriculture was a bit of a head-scratcher. Was there a farmer or something in the castle? If so, why?

Parallel Thinking and Speed Reader were honestly very useful Skills. I was surprised by that. Did these come from nobles? Thanks, guys!

Sleight of Hand, though? I'm not a street magician.

And Drunken Rage? Why would I want to fly into a rage?

Sexual Prowess most likely meant that there was a prostitute in the castle. I was conflicted about that. It might come in handy...but did I really need it?

Thought Acceleration and Spatial Awareness were useful Skills that had probably come from knights. A big thank-you to the people who gave these to me. Then again, I already kinda had a Skill for spatial awareness thanks to my Eye of True Sight, so maybe I didn't really need it.

Party Tricks and Pen Spinning? There were people out there whose greatest talents were *these* Skills?

Tabletop Gaming? Hm, maybe I could make a game when I was bored.

Gambling wasn't something I planned to do, but maybe I could apply the Skill to battles or strategies. If that was possible, I was happy to have gotten my hands on it.

Great Fortune was a nice Skill to get. No idea how to raise it, though.

Wait, Misfortune? Wow, really don't want this Skill. How do I make sure I *don't* raise it?

Bad Luck with Women? Not interested in being *that* kind of protagonist.

Painter and Musician must've come from nobles. Compared to their other Skills, these were much more practical.

Architect felt like it might be pretty useful, if combined with Armament Craft.

Singer, Dancer, and Court Etiquette must've been other noble Skills. If I ever became a noble, I'd be set... Not that I had plans to do so.

Poker Face was nice to have, but according to Ariya, I already had one.

Side-to-Side Hopping was someone's best Skill? Kinda made me want to know their life story.

Blink Step, Quickdraw, and Dual Wielding were pretty standard but useful Skills. There must've been an elite warrior among the knights.

Bondage... Not interested. Though it might be useful if combined

with String Arts.

Flirting and Wink must've come from one of the gaudier noble men. *Watch out, ladies.*

Fake Laughing... Seriously? Again—*this* was someone's best Skill?

Self-control sounded kinda rough. What could happen to a guy to make *that* their best Skill? Well, either way, it seemed like it might be useful.

Fear Resistance, Pain Resistance, Poison Resistance, Charm Resistance, Heat Resistance, Physical Resistance, and Cold Resistance were honestly great to have. However, I was already a vampire, so it's hard to know if poison would even work on me in the first place. I wasn't eager to test this theory, so I guess I'd just find out someday.

And that was all my Skills. I got the feeling that I'd have a lot of 'em by the time I died. Skills weren't really useful at level 1. The ones I used regularly would grow on their own, but the useless Skills would stay at level 1 in the worst-case scenario. I might never end up using them at all. Fortunately, I would live for a very long time. I had more than enough time to raise even the more useless Skills...well, excluding Misfortune. That could stay at level 1.

Speaking of raising levels, there was something I needed to tell Ariya.

"Hey, get over here." I beckoned to her as she was flying through the air. *She's already pretty much got the hang of it. Is this her "genius" kicking in? I'm impressed.*

"Coming... What do you need?" Ariya asked as she landed, folding away her bat-like wings before running over to me. *Wow, she's like a dog or something.*

"I wanna talk about your growth." Just like me, drinking blood would increase her stats and heal her. *Copycat.*

"My growth?"

"Yeah—let's talk about how you're gonna raise your stats."

I'd been thinking about this for a while. It was probably best for her to select a few targets to suck blood from in order to get their stats.

"From now on, you should target fast monsters and focus on raising your AGI—your agility."

Simply put, it was hard to become faster by strengthening your muscles. More muscles meant greater mass. To be fast, you wanted less weight. Putting on muscle was already really hard for us, since we had superhuman strength. However, we had an ability that allowed us to increase our stats without any kind of special training.

In my experience, increasing STR and VIT didn't increase my body mass. In terms of what we got out of our stat increases, I gave VIT a low priority because we were able to regenerate. In my opinion, the

order in which we needed to prioritize stats was AGI, INT, DEX, STR, and then VIT. This was especially true for a mage like Ariya.

I explained my thinking to Ariya.

"I've yet to experience directly strengthening my stats, so I'm not entirely sure what you mean, but I will take your suggestion to heart." She paused. "What should we do in a close-quarters combat situation? If I support you from behind, you will have to be the vanguard."

"Well, my STR is decently high, so I don't think we'll have to worry too much about that." Saying that, I pulled a dark, lustrous katana from my shadow.

"Is that..."

"Yeah. I swiped it."

Shadow Zekkinotachi (Creator: Inori Takafuji)
Quality: SSS / Value: 1000000000 Dells / Abilities: Omnislice, Shadow Hardening, Regeneration, Growth
A modified Artifact. A discovery from an ancient civilization, forged with lost technology, and then later modified. Can cut through anything if the user supplies mana to the blade. Anything that touches the blade while it is infused with mana will be cut and broken to bits. The blade's body has been fortified. It can regenerate by taking in blood, and can grow stronger.

I'd taken Aegiana's Zekkinotachi, used Armament Craft on it, and ended up with this. The fact that I could so easily modify an Artifact reminded me just how broken my cheat was. I'd left a fake Zekkinotachi that I'd made with Armament Craft next to her body, though the fire had probably scorched it so badly that nobody'd realize what it was. After all, if it wasn't provided with mana, Zekkinotachi was a normal sword. It wouldn't be out of the ordinary for it to break. It'd be difficult for anyone to figure out that the decoy I left wasn't the real deal right off the bat.

"I still can't use it, though." After forging it last night, I'd tested it out, but still no dice. There was a real possibility that I couldn't use magic tools at all. All my magic Skills were at level 1 too, so maybe it was that I simply wasn't able to use anything magical that originated in this world.

"You can't? Even if you can't use this world's magic, you still have mana."

"Yeah... I'm not really sure what's going on."

Instinctively, I felt like there was something wrong with the mana and magic in this world. It was almost as if someone was directly

manipulating them. I was neither good at manipulating mana myself, nor could I use any of the Skills that I'd acquired involving magic or magic tools.

"It's a shame that you obtained a powerful weapon but are unable to use it."

"Whatever. You can have it." I handed her the blade.

"Huh?"

"You have the Genius Divine Blessing, so maybe you'll have better luck than me."

At least now that she had the sword, that'd solve her close-combat problems. Now that we'd discussed what I wanted to discuss, I could go back to sleep.

"Huh? Uh, this..."

"What?"

Ariya stared at the blade in confusion. *Can you wrap this up already? I'm really sleepy.*

"Are you sure it's okay for me to have this?"

"Obviously. I gave it to you. I'm about to pass out, so can I go now?" I didn't even wait for her response. I turned around and headed back to the hut, but, once again, she stopped me.

"You know I'm plotting against you, don't you?"

"Sure, but you still serve me." *That's why I need you to get stronger. Ugh... Can't think straight. Too tired.*

"Just take it, okay? I'm gonna sleep."

"W-Wait!" She tried to stop me again, but I ignored her, went into the hut, and passed out on my hard bed.

I heard a sound from beside me, jolting me awake. I'd made two separate rooms in this hut—one for me and one for Ariya, partly because I felt it'd be morally wrong for a guy and a girl to be in the same room. Plus, personally speaking, I didn't want her infringing on my privacy. Actually, the latter was my main reason for my decision.

I looked outside and saw that the sky had turned a red color as the sun set. My stats hadn't returned to their normal levels yet, which meant that it wasn't completely night. It might as well have been dawn to me.

The sound didn't stop, which meant that it wasn't Ariya just going back to sleep. She must've been awake and moving around. *Why?* Then again, it's not like she needed to care about what time of day it was.

Maybe she'd finally come up with a plan to kill me. Just as I thought that, Ariya entered my room. Without thinking, I was on my guard, which couldn't be helped because my first thought had been about her killing me. She stood there for a few moments before

opening her mouth.

"Inori... Can I sleep with you?"

"What? Are you scared? I'll read you a picture book until you fall asleep."

"I'm not *scared*!"

"You're not? Then tell me what you want. Clearly."

She fell silent again, her cheeks red, and began nervously fidgeting. I didn't blame her. She was only wearing her underwear.

"Well, um... If you're trying to seduce me, you should at least come appropriately dressed."

"Wha— That's not it at all!!!"

What is she so mad about? Is it because I haven't made her any nightclothes? How thoughtless of me. I'll get right on that.

"Say no more. Let's take this cloth that I swiped from the castle and..." *Armament Craft*. "Voila. A fresh pair of pajamas. Put 'em on."

"Thank you...?"

"Good. Now go and stand by the door again."

"Okay... Like this?"

"Perfect. Now, from the top. Action!"

"Inori, can we sleep together... Wait, this is stupid!" Her face was even redder than when she'd first come in. Her eyes were moist with tears. *Hmm, maybe I went a little too far.*

"Why do you want us to sleep together?"

"Before you turned me into a vampire, you asked me if I was prepared to serve you." *Uh-huh, I did.* "And yet, last night, you didn't try to do anything to me. But I'm prepared, so..."

Hold up. There's something wrong with that logic... Oh, I get it.

"You think you're my sex slave, don't you? My bad—didn't mean to make you think that."

"Huh? B-But you told me you didn't care how I interpreted your words."

"Yeah, because I wanted you to be prepared for anything. I wanted you to really consider what it would mean to continue living and then choose it anyway. Do I *look* like the kind of person who'd make you my sex slave?"

"Huh?" She looked at me, dumbfounded, as if to say, "*Of course you do.*"

Rude. Why would she think that way about me? What about me gives off that impression? All I've done is ogle women's bodies and be completely true to my desires, perverse or otherwise. Hm... Okay, guess I do seem like that kind of person. If anything, it might be weirder that I *haven't* made a move on her.

"Well, at any rate, I have no intention of sleeping with you."

"B-But..."

At this point, she could've just left and gone back to her own room. Did she *want* to have sex or something?! No way she actually wanted that. She could get pregnant, which would further restrict her freedom. Why was she coming to me with this idea? Maybe, by entering into a carnal relationship with me, she thought she could protect herself?

"Are you scared of me?"

"H-Huh?! N-No..."

"You might not be conscious of it, but everyone's scared of the unknown."

Now that I thought about it, she'd been acting kinda weird ever since I gave her that blade. *I guess she was suspiciously obedient before that too.* Maybe she was confused by how the person she openly said she wanted to kill had given her a weapon—their best weapon, in fact.

"I gave you that blade for one reason. If you were to be killed and then dissected, it's possible that our enemies would be able to figure out my weakness. In other words, giving you that sword is just me covering my own ass." *I need her to become stronger sooner rather than later.* "Also, I'm more than happy for you to be my enemy. Pretty sure I said something to that effect before as well." *I want her to try to kill me.* As twisted as it was, I was interested in her.

"I see..."

"Get it now?"

"Yes. Why did I try to do something as stupid as offering my body to you...?"

"Eh. It's getting cold. Get in here."

"Okay... H-Huh?!"

I shifted over to leave some space in my bed and patted it.

Ariya shot me a look of confusion. "If I recall, you said you have no intention of sleeping with me."

"Yep. But I'd like to use you to level up a Skill or two."

"Huh?!"

While we'd been having this conversation, the sun had set, which meant my Skills had returned to their normal strength.

"I got Sexual Prowess from Skill Pilfer. I wanna level up as many Skills as I can...well, most of them, anyway. So help me out."

"A-Absolutely not!"

"You can't refuse. You serve me. Obey my orders."

"N-No..."

After that, the hut filled with Ariya's screams...or, well, not screams exactly. I won't get into the nitty-gritty, though. Either way, my spank bank got a little fuller. I love Photographic Memory.

Side Story 3

Maccad Empire Castle, Interrogation Room

“The statement that ‘the human known as Inori Takafuji no longer lives’ was deemed to be true.”

Seated at a round table, a woman dressed in a uniform read the results of her report aloud.

“The statement regarding the incident of arson in the Rising Sun Kingdom’s castle, where he claimed that ‘A meddlesome demon who had little to nothing to do with the coup infiltrated the castle. He ran into the knight captain by chance and tried blackmailing her into accepting his marriage proposal. However, she flat-out refused him. Angered, the demon killed her and then reduced the entire castle to cinders’ was deemed to be true.”

Occupying the other seats around the table were the leaders from each country of the alliance. The one speaking was the Chancellor of the Maccad Empire, Indera Djenda.

“The statement about the demon who ‘introduced himself as the new demon king and declared war on the hero army’ was also deemed to be true. This concludes the testimony of the hero, Ryuto Shinzaki.”

“A new demon king? He must be quite formidable indeed, to be able to burn an entire castle down.”

“We can’t ignore this.”

“Don’t you find it strange for a demon to propose marriage to one of our species, though?”

“No—demons are eccentric beings. I’ve heard that there used to be a village in the Republic of Ghrantze that took demons as sex slaves.”

“In any case, his statements weren’t flagged as false, so he must be telling the truth.”

“The Maccad Empire will continue its investigation of the heroes. Please raise your hands if you have any questions.” At Indera’s words, a man nervously raised his hand. “The pope from the Holy Land of Ryne is recognized.”

“Who is this ‘Inori Takafuji’ individual? This is the first I’ve heard of him. Was he a hero?”

“Allow me to explain,” said Indera with a nod. “He was the fourth hero summoned in the ritual performed by the Rising Sun Kingdom.”

The man was unsatisfied with her reply. “Why weren’t we informed of this?”

Paying no heed to his attitude, the chancellor calmly replied, “The Rising Sun Kingdom apparently tried to hide the fact of his summoning from us. We only caught wind of it through our information channels. However, we lacked hard evidence to corroborate such claims, so we elected not to bring it up during the hero army meeting.”

“A *fourth* hero? This is unprecedented.”

“He was an irregular. His physical abilities were that of a layman, or perhaps lower. None of that matters anymore, though. We’ve no means to learn anything else about him.”

The pope from Ryne brought his hand to his chin, falling into thought. “I understand,” he said, apparently deciding against continuing that line of questioning. “There’s no point in discussing this any further.”

The chancellor looked away from the pope and scanned the faces of the other members around the table. “Are there any other questions? If not...”

“Hold up.” She was stopped by a guy who spoke in a low voice, without any pretense or formality. He had a large, muscular frame, and a very bushy beard covering his rugged face.

“President Rudolf Bilgon of the Dwyr Federation is recognized.”

“This ain’t exactly a question, but... Here we are, at the round table in the Maccad Empire. And I coulda sworn that, as the suzerain, you promised that all information obtained would be shared with members of the alliance, in the interest of fairness. That’s funny, ’cause I coulda sworn you just admitted to keeping the existence of a fourth hero in the Rising Sun Kingdom from us. How’s *that* fair?” He shot the chancellor a sharp look, but she neither cowered nor looked away.

“As I previously explained, the information about the fourth hero was neither confirmed nor deemed particularly important. Consequently, we made the decision to hold off on releasing a statement until we’d received concrete proof. I apologize that we’re only sharing this knowledge after the fact. However, we’ve now shared everything we know about Inori Takafuji.”

“Oh, I couldn’t care less about him. Rather, I’ve got a bone to pick with the fact that the Maccad Empire is *still* hiding information about the heroes.”

At these words, the room began to buzz. Rudolf glared right at Indera with a faint grin. Up until this moment, she’d handled things coolly, without causing a ruckus. But he hadn’t missed the very slight twitch in her eye at his accusation.

“There’s a legend about the last generation of heroes, one that’s been passed down through time. They stayed in a small settlement called Galhey. Apparently, they wielded a power that surpassed Divine Blessings.”

“That is but a folktale. It’s more than likely that it’s been rather exaggerated over the years.”

“But the exact same legend has been passed down in other villages. Hard to believe it’s all just one big coincidence.”

Indera began to panic internally. The last generation of heroes had visited the Dwyr Federation during the latter half of their travels. Since this had been after the heroes had received their *powers*, it was possible that information about it had leaked...but she hadn’t expected for it to have persisted in the form of a folk legend.

“Please, allow me to explain—”

“No, that’s quite all right, Chancellor.”

“Your Majesty?”

The emperor of the Maccad Empire commanded Indera to sit down. “I will admit that we have not been forthright with all our knowledge. However, please understand that what we do not share has been deemed to be of no use, so there is no need for it to be disclosed.”

“Not useful? Even though the information could help us bolster the ranks of the hero army? Even a child could see that it’s not useless. You’ve gotta be kidding.”

“I’ll allow the chancellor to explain in further detail.”

“Yes, sir.” At the emperor’s command, Indera took the floor once more. “What President Rudolf is referring to—a power that exceeds even Divine Blessings—has been named ‘Over Box.’”

“The hell kinda name is that? Why not a simpler name, like ‘Awakening’ or something?”

“We appropriated what the previous generation of heroes called it. In that sense, it’s the perfect appellation.”

Since none of this information was being written down, the only thing those present could do was attempt to parse it mentally.

“Judging from statements by the heroes, Over Box was an ability that only heroes of their generation could use, which released the true potential of their Divine Blessings. It is uncertain what conditions needed to be met in order for them to use this ability. We chose not to release this information so that heroes would not jump immediately to relying on it and would instead diligently train.”

“That reasoning seems weak to me. I’d sooner accept the idea that you were keeping it all to yourselves so as to monopolize it.”

“We had other reasons. We feared what might happen if countries tried to have their heroes master Over Box.”

“Huh? Why?” Rudolf was puzzled, and he wasn’t alone in his confusion. The rest of the members around the table also seemed to be caught off guard by this. “What scared you about that?”

“According to records from three hundred years ago, the previous generation of heroes had enough power to take on an entire country. They were so powerful that it was possible they could have conquered the whole world.”

“You’re exaggerating.”

“Perhaps a little... But at the very least, it’s certain that Over Box grants heroes power many times greater than what the demon king possesses. In fact, it was so powerful of an ability that even the previous heroes themselves were not forthright with the Maccad Empire about its existence.”

“Do you mean to say that the peace which ensued after the defeat of the demon king three hundred years ago was due to the heroes’ strength of character?”

“Yes. Part of the reason why we created a hero army is because of Over Box. The more heroes we have in our employ, the lower the chance they will be overwhelmed by the great number of enemies in the demon king’s army. As such, we think they will be less likely to resort to using Over Box.”

The reason that countries were incentivized to summon more heroes was to make conquering the demon king easier. However, they also had to make sure that there was a limit on how many heroes each country summoned, or else there would be a large power imbalance, which could result in war.

“Hmph, fine... I get it. But you should know that, having heard this, I’ve lost some confidence in the Maccad Empire. I’ll be expecting an appropriate response.”

“Very well. Noted.”

“Are there any other questions? If not, we will move to the next topic.” Indera surveyed the room, but nobody spoke up. “In that case, I will proceed. I’ve already mentioned this, but the three heroes from the Rising Sun Kingdom are currently under our protection. We’d like to discuss which country will take them in.” Indera began flipping through the documents in her hands. “First, allow me to present our position on this. Taking into account each country’s resources and convenience, as well as the heroes’ current mental states, we believe that the Maccad Empire should continue to care for them. Are there any objections to this?”

“Nope.”

“No.”

“None.”

“Nah.”

“That’s fine.”

“Nope.”

“No.”

“Nuh-uh.”

“None come to mind.”

The remaining members around the table all voiced their agreement at once. The only country that could afford the luxury of taking in three additional heroes was the Maccad Empire. On top of that, it was already weakened by the assaults from the demon king’s army. Even with six heroes, the Maccad Empire would not surpass the other countries in strength. With that in mind, allowing them to have a few more heroes wouldn’t be a problem.

“Excluding the absent representatives from the Republic of Ghrantze and the Rising Sun Kingdom, which has been destroyed, let the record show that all ten present representatives voted in favor of this resolution. We will now move to the next topic.” Indera once again flipped through her documents. “As for the territory which belonged to the former Rising Sun Kingdom, precedent dictates that it is not within the scope of our discussion. However, since all representatives excluding the one from Ghrantze are present, I’d like to propose a partnership of joint rule over the territory. Are there any objections?”

“It’s ridiculous to feud amongst ourselves while the demon king’s armies are knocking at our doorsteps. I believe we should indeed enter a partnership.”

“Agreed.” The rest of the room nodded in approval.

“Very well then. We have received approval from all ten present representatives from the Maccad Empire, the Dwyr Federation, the Holy Land of Ryne, the Empire of Gyrham, the Principality of Kanady, the Confederation of Eyghyl, the Sanctum of Oza, the country of El’Samurr, the Principality of Alein, and the Republic of Quish. We shall jointly rule over the former Rising Sun Kingdom’s territories. As for the specifics, we will hold a separate discussion in the coming days. We will now move to the next topic.” Indera once again flipped through the documents. “Please turn to page twenty-four.”

The room was filled with the sound of rustling paper. After it subsided, Indera continued speaking.

“The chart on this page shows the Divine Blessings of the current thirty-six heroes, sorted by rank. We only recently received information on the three heroes from the Rising Sun Kingdom and the three heroes from the Republic of Ghrantze, so please consider these updates temporary while we work on a final version, to be issued at a later date.”

A Rank:

Mana Affinity / Physical Affinity / Martial Arts /
Spatial Magic

B Rank:

Swordsmanship / Lance Arts / Archery / Shield Arts /
Barrier Magic / Light Magic / Fire Magic / Wind
Magic / Water Magic / Earth Magic

C Rank:

Jujitsu / Melee Combat / Jo Mastery / Karate / Heat
Magic / Ice Magic / Particle Magic / Disintegration
Magic / Limit Breaker / Body Fortification / Magic
Fortification / Telepathy / Omniscience

D Rank:

Household Magic / Cooking / Clairvoyance / Alchemy

E Rank:

Dark Magic / Theriomorphosis

Aberrant:

Count / Note / Total Shut-In

“Magic Affinity *and* Barrier Magic? Impressive.”

“The Rising Sun Kingdom could’ve done with sharing this information sooner. I would’ve supported them as much as they’d needed.”

“Well, you know how their queen was...”

“It looks like there’s a new aberrant too. I’m assuming they’re from Ghrantze?”

“There’s too many aberrant Divine Blessings for my liking. Sure, three isn’t that many, but it’s certainly more than expected.”

“To add on to that, the only ability we fully understand is the Maccad Empire’s Count. Note is the Divine Blessing of a hero from Ghrantze, and Total Shut-In is the Divine Blessing of another Maccad Empire hero. Said hero is currently under observation and counseling to determine the nature of this blessing.”

“It’s hard to determine what these aberrant Divine Blessings do just from their name.”

“What is a ‘Total Shut-In,’ anyway? The words hardly make any sense. I bet the hero has no clue what it means either,” Rudolf remarked.

Oh, I think he does—he just doesn’t want to explain, Indera quipped internally. She cleared her throat as the commotion died down, and went on. “After some research, we are considering changing the rank of the former Rising Sun Kingdom’s hero’s Limit Breaker to aberrant.”

“Why is that?”

“Is there not documentation of this Divine Blessing?”

Indera nodded. “Yes—the ability itself seems no different than how it was described in past documentation. However, the hero only gained a full understanding of the ability recently, and not at the time of summoning.”

“That certainly does fit the definition of an aberrant Divine Blessing...”

“As such, please be aware that there is a possibility that Ryuto Shinzaki’s Divine Blessing will be reclassified as aberrant.”



Maccad Empire Castle, Training Hall

“H-Hey, Ryuto? Shouldn’t you sto—” Tamaki called out, worry in her voice.

“Be quiet. Urgh!” Ryuto let out a groan, falling to all fours. In the next moment, he began to cough intensely. When the coughing fit finally passed through him, he tried to stand up, but found that he was shaking like a newborn deer. *Using Limit Breaker multiple times in a row is rough...but each time I do, I can tell that the time I can keep it activated is lengthening*, he thought. “Limit Breaker!”

The cost of using Limit Breaker was severe fatigue and muscle pain. Even so, Ryuto continued to use it—and this was despite the fact that it also amplified one’s senses, including one’s sense of pain. The agony he was in should have been unbearable, and forcing an already-exhausted body to fortify itself would only hurt it more.

“Gah!” Still, even through all the pain, screaming gutturally and sweating profusely, Ryuto did not deactivate Limit Breaker. It was unclear to him whether this was an effect of Limit Breaker itself or simply because of his constitution as a hero, but he was sure that the pain was making his body stronger. As such, he was convinced that this was the most efficient way for him to train. “Argh!” Once Limit Breaker ended, another wave of extreme pain washed over Ryuto.

Tamaki felt tears welling up in her eyes but still didn’t take her gaze off him.

“R-Ryuto, what are you doing?!” Aoi, who’d just arrived, yelled out as she ran towards him.

I’m sorry, Aoi...but I need to get stronger. If I don’t... Images of the captain handling him easily and of Inori sneering at him flashed through his mind. *I need power to fight against this injustice.* Just as Ryuto was about to reactivate Limit Breaker, though, a voice rang out across the room.

“Okay, hold it right there. I dunno why you’re so desperate, but you’re putting yourself under way too much strain.” The voice laughed lightly.

Ryuto glared at the owner of the voice—a young guy with black

hair and sharp eyes. Standing next to him was a black-haired girl who gave off a very gentle feeling.

“Who are *you*?”

“Oh, right—introductions.” The guy acted as though he’d had a sudden revelation. “I’m Keito Kinjo. This cutie over here is Sora Saijo. Nice to meet ya.”

“‘Cutie’? Aw, you!”

Ryuto’s eye twitched in annoyance at the scene before him. However, he couldn’t just ignore them—he needed to follow suit and introduce himself as well.

“I’m Ryuto Shinzaki. This is Tamaki Karasawa and Aoi Isoya.”

“I’m Tamaki.”

“I’m...Aoi.”

“Judging by your names, you’re all Japanese too... Heroes?” Ryuto asked.

Keito’s lips widened into a smile. “That’s right! We’re the heroes of the Maccad Empire. My Divine Blessing is Count—an aberrant. Sora’s is an A-Rank, though—Spatial Magic! What about you guys?”

“‘Rank’? What’s that all about?”

“Ahh... Don’t worry about it.”

Ryuto’s eyes narrowed as his question was brushed off. “I have Limit Breaker, Tamaki has Mana Affinity, and Aoi has Barrier Magic.”

“Oh, what? Really?! Ha ha, just kidding. I already knew that.”

Ryuto was really starting to get pissed off, though he had little idea why.

“Heroes are summoned in threes, right? Where’s the last of you?” Ryuto asked.

“Hm? Oh, you mean Zenta Arai? He’s on a trip right now.”

“A trip?”

“Eh, we’re not really sure. They want him to figure out his Divine Blessing or somethin’.” Shrugging it off, Keito continued the conversation. “Anyways, welcome to the Maccad Empire! If there’s anythin’ you wanna know, feel free to ask! Let’s be friends! After all, we’re gonna be livin’ here together.”

“Nice to meet all of you!” Sora said happily.

Ryuto hesitated, but then reached out and shook Keito’s outstretched hand. “Yeah...nice to meet you,” he said in a low voice.



A single road stretched across a plain. A carriage drawn by a pair of horses trundled down this road, kicking up the light-brown dirt as it went. Beside it was a single adventurer, who was most likely there as a bodyguard. Meanwhile, inside the plain-looking coach was a guy who was currently in the middle of letting out a very pathetic groan.

“Ugh... My ass hurts. I should’ve learned more about vehicle suspension systems when I was in Japan. Hey, Mei—are we there yet?”

“We’ve hardly begun our journey. For your information, carriages with suspension systems exist...but only at a high price.” The maid who was also in the carriage, whose name was apparently Mei, answered the pitiful young man.

“Seriously? Let’s buy one! I’ve got the money!”

“There’s a limit to the funds you received from the empire. You’ll have to either earn your own money or save up for it.”

“But they splurged on a bodyguard...”

“Having a bodyguard is necessary. Being comfortable while traveling is a luxury.”

“That’s not fair, Mei. Don’t you care if the skin on my ass peels off?”

“Please rest assured that, if it does, I will simply use healing magic.”

“Uh...” At this point, the adventurer who’d been hired as a bodyguard spoke up. As soon as he did, though, the young man inside the carriage froze up. The adventurer blinked. “Hm?”

“What...is...up?” said the young man stiffly.

Watching the two of them interact, the maid decided to intervene. “My apologies. He is very shy and has great difficulty speaking with others.”

“He seemed to be speaking fine with you, though.”

“As his maid, I am an exception. Regardless, how may I help you?”

“Oh. Well... I was just curious about the relationship between you two. It doesn’t really seem like a typical master-servant relationship. Doesn’t look like this young man is a noble either.”

“Isn’t it poor manners to pry into the circumstances of the ones who hired you?”

“O-Oh, I was just curious. I didn’t mean to pry. Just forget it, then.”

“All right—I shall.”

The conversation promptly came to an end, leaving silence in its wake. Though the maid and Zenta had previously been having quite a lively conversation, Zenta was now so stiff that not even a single word escaped his lips. Suddenly, the carriage shook violently, hitting the young man in the butt.

“Ow!”

“Are you hurt? Shall I cast some healing magic on you?”

“No, I’m fine...” Zenta declined her offer, with the understanding that it’d be pretty pathetic if he asked for healing over such a trivial

thing. *This sucks. I was isekai'd but I'm still such a wimp. I don't even know how to use this stupid Divine Blessing...* He let out a sigh. He was Zenta Arai, third hero of the Maccad Empire and holder of the Total Shut-In Divine Blessing.

Chapter 1

A few years ago...

It was a nearly pitch-black space, devoid of all light but the dim glow of lamps strewn across the stone walls. At the end of the large, auditorium-like room, there was a majestic throne at the top of a set of stone steps, adorned with precious metals. However, there was no one seated upon it.

Right before the throne was a huddle of shadowy figures surrounding a pile of corpses—humans, elves, dwarves, dragonewts, beasts, and demons. Blood flowed from the bodies, wetting the floor below.

Beneath this carnage was an elaborate and majestic magic circle. It was packed to the brim with mana, and when it glowed, the countless glyphs and markings that constituted it emitted a purple light. The demons surrounding the circle let out a breath of wonder as it activated.

They were currently in the middle of the demon king resurrection ritual. Typically, the demon king was reincarnated into a new body without any further intervention, but this time was different. This time, the demons were trying to resurrect the demon king, Ighnoa, rumored to be the strongest of all.

The previous generation of heroes, themselves considered the strongest generation, had had a great impact on the demons. In order to expand their territory, restore the confidence of their people, and get revenge on the humans and the demi-humans, they needed power that surpassed that of the previous demon king. They were not willing to wait for a strong demon king to be born. The death of the previous demon king had only emphasized the greatness of the king who had come before him.

Demons had long life spans. Some of their oldest members had been alive six hundred years ago, when the old demon king still walked this world. They had very fond memories of Ighnoa and firmly believed that he was the one true demon king.

Over time, they offered many sacrifices and much mana in order to lay the groundwork for his revival. And after he was revived, they would once again crown him demon king. The magic circle began glowing more fiercely, and the departed souls from the pile of corpses began to combine into one.

The demon with the highest authority of them all—the vampire Heriu—gazed upon the ritual, looking conflicted. The stronger a demon was in battle, the higher an authority they possessed. Simply put, she was the strongest demon present.

If they hadn't resorted to resurrecting Ighnoa, it was likely she would've ascended to become the demon king of this generation. However, some of the greater demons argued that she wasn't suited for the role, and so proceeded with their ritual.

Heriu accepted this without protest. Of course, as her ambitions were great, she wasn't too pleased with the outcome. Vampires lived a long time. Though she may have looked like she was only in the latter half of her teen years by human standards, in actuality, she'd already lived for seven hundred years. She'd been alive when Ighnoa had ruled, and she had served him. She had great respect for him, though, so she had set aside her ambitions and instead devoted herself to ensuring that the ritual succeeded.

The light grew even brighter, eliciting sounds of wonder from the demons. The flesh forming before their eyes began taking the shape of a human, which meant that the summoning had been a success. In the face of his overwhelming power, they felt fear, awe, respect...and an incredibly strong urge to kill him.

Heriu and the other demons were confused by the instinctive urge to kill that they felt rising in them. As fear and the desire to kill washed over them, they stiffened. None of them were able to move a muscle or even make a sound. At last, when the light finally began to fade, they were able to lay their eyes upon the visage of the demon king. None of them had witnessed this form before, which only made them more bloodthirsty.

Heriu was especially confused. She *knew* Ighnoa. Even if time had passed, the pressure he put out, as well as the sensation of his mana, was none other than that of the demon king Ighnoa. So why did she feel the urge not to revere him, but to kill him? She hadn't felt this way seven hundred years ago.

To demons, the demon king was irreplaceable. They could not oppose him. Nobody would dare even think about betraying him. There was not a single demon who would see the demon king as his enemy.

"Heh heh..." Ighnoa laughed lightly.

Everyone present trembled. Despite the fact that all around him were stricken by the urge to kill him, Ighnoa had laughed so naturally. An unknown fear washed over Heriu, but the intent to kill remained. Ighnoa stood up and looked around at the demons. His eyes landed on Heriu, and he pointed at her slowly.

"It's you, right?" he asked, in a low voice that nevertheless made

the room shake. "You're the strongest here."

Heriu looked into the crescent-shaped eyes which saw right through her.

"Look at her. She's your new demon king. Obey her."

His words made no sense. Why would a demon king toss away his authority and entrust it to someone else? None of it made sense. Despite these confusing words and the persistent killing intent, however, the demons had no choice but to obey his orders. When receiving an order from one with more authority than you, the only option was to obey. Usually, a demon addressed in such a manner would respond in the affirmative, but they were too frozen from fear to do so. At this, Ighnoa snorted and began to walk away.

"P-Please, wait!" Heriu was the first to shake off her fear. She called out to Ighnoa, who stopped and slowly turned to face her. She wanted to ask him what his intentions were...but how could she question the intention of one with a higher authority than her? Also, she remained filled with murderous intent. She had no right to ask. Still, she was able to force out a single question. "Where... Where are you going?"

"No clue. Anywhere but here."

This didn't answer her question, but she knew better than to question him again. Instead, she decided to ask something else.

"What will you do?"

Ighnoa's lips curled into a smile. "Destroy the world."



"Welcome! Something catch your eye?"

"These are a little expensive. Give me a discount, would you?"

"Please, daddy?"

"Hey, watch where you're goin'!"

"Whew, yer a beauty. Buy you a drink?"

"Fuck off!"

Detection enhanced my senses, including my hearing, meaning that I could hear all the chatter in the town. This only made my hatred for crowds grow.

"There are so many people. Even the castle town in the Rising Sun Kingdom wasn't this crowded."

"You've never been to other countries?"

"We were already a fairly secluded country, so if we *did* go anywhere, it was only in a heavily guarded carriage. I never had the leisure of appreciating the cities."

"So you're a sheltered little princess? Well...not so much anymore, I guess."

We were currently in Regin, a town in the Holy Land of Ryne.

Though it was a little remote, it served as a relay town for commerce. It was also a regional town that had a highway running through it. There was a lot more life here than in the Rising Sun Kingdom; I really couldn't help but wonder just how crappy the financial situation had been there.

"Even if the location is rather remote, the liveliness of the place truly makes me feel free. It's wonderful. If I'd stayed in the castle, I'd never have gotten to see this scenery," Ariya said in tones of admiration as she gazed at the town.

Here, there were the loud voices of shopkeepers trying to draw in customers, customers trying to haggle, so many signs lit by magic tools all lining the brick road, guys trying to pick up girls, and said girls responding with a firm kick to the crotch. Well...aside from that bit, it was completely different from the heavy atmosphere of the Rising Sun Kingdom.

Speaking of which, there was now a little bit of fuss over the guy who'd gotten kicked in the balls. *What is this—reality TV?* That kinda thing is pretty tough on guys. Also... *Uh, Ariya? Why are you swinging your leg? Practicing your ball-kicking, perhaps? Are you planning on using that technique on some poor sap? Like...someone who isn't able to dodge during the daytime because of their weakened status?*

Ariya had calmed down a fair bit since we'd left the castle. She was a lot more cheerful now. Usually, if your parents and sister had been murdered, you'd be a little more reserved, but not her. Sure, they hadn't exactly treated her that well, but I hadn't taken her to be the type to be relieved that her parents were dead. *I really don't get how other people think.*

"So, where to now?" she asked.

"Well, first, we need money."

I'd looted some gold pieces from the Rising Sun Kingdom, but it was likely that we couldn't use them anywhere since the country didn't really exist anymore. It'd be best for us to earn some of the currency in this country.

"So we're going to work?"

"Yeah. Adventurers exist, right? We're gonna do that."

"Huh? Are you sure about that? Don't we want to keep our abilities a secret? I have a feeling we won't be able to hide things if we're fighting monsters. You're not trying to live out some foolish dream of yours by becoming an adventurer, are you?"

She'd become much more lax...well, actually, harsh...with me. She'd say scornful things to me with a smile. *I don't remember you being like this, that night. Back then, you at least knew how to hold back. There must be some kind of reason for her behavior... Hm, I wonder who could be responsible.*

“I’m not planning on staying here for too long, anyway. We don’t want any long-term jobs, so being an adventurer is best. Makes it easier to cut and run.”

If we were to try a different route like starting a business, we’d need knowledge of this world, which I severely lacked. On top of being smart, I’d need to be able to chart the muddy waters of the trade world. With that in mind, it’d be much better for us to choose the world where only brawn was necessary. That way, no one would figure out our abilities or race.

The reason we were here in this remote town was because it was the closest place we could get to. As I’d predicted, after the chaos in the Rising Sun Kingdom, the various lords had tried to make a claim for the throne. The only problem was that their armies weren’t very strong to start with, so their battles weren’t large-scale or anything. It ended up just being some squabbles here and there. Even so, the guards for each territory were very strict about who they let in and out. In contrast, nobody was paying attention to uninhabited lands.

Traveling through from Fenrir’s forest, you first reached an undeveloped land infested with monsters. Past that land was Regin, a remote town in the Holy Land of Ryne. The isolated aspect of this town was why we were here. The town existed at the border of Ryne in order to protect the rest of the Holy Land from monsters.

In short, this was the first town we had made it to. The monsters here were fairly strong, so they’d be perfect for raising my levels and Skills. I’d also heard there were monsters who were highly intelligent. At this rate, I’d be able to focus on the stats that I wanted to grow.

I already knew what I wanted Ariya and myself to prioritize when raising our stats. Raising our agility was harder than putting on muscle. We had to put on muscle while still keeping our bodies light. This was next to impossible when we were already at superhuman levels of strength.

However, there was a way to get around that. As long as we chose our targets well, we could absorb the right stats when we sucked their blood. Even if I had a lot of STR and VIT, it wouldn’t increase my body mass. And in order to take full advantage of our raised stats, it was important to focus on things other than VIT. It wasn’t all that useful, since we had regeneration.

Our priority was AGI, INT, DEX, STR, and then VIT. This was especially true for a mage like Ariya. If our plan was to just raise our stats, then we didn’t have to come to town, but I had to take the daytime into consideration. I was weakened during the day, so I needed a safe place to hide—I didn’t have a death wish. I knew full well what going out there defenseless meant. I’d been able to hide

within the barrier of Fenrir's forest, but I wasn't about to camp out in the general wilderness.

I hadn't leveled up since leaving the Rising Sun Kingdom. The only monsters around me were Kechos. I needed stronger monsters, and a more efficient hunting ground. Ariya could only get stats from sucking the blood of others, so staying there didn't help her much either.

Getting here from the Rising Sun Kingdom wasn't a one-night affair. We had to travel a decent distance to get here, which meant that I'd been weakened at various points along the journey. So what did I do? Since Ariya's strength wasn't affected by the time of day, I'd sent her ahead of me. Then I'd used my Eye of True Sight to track her, remembering the path she'd taken.

Then, when she'd arrived at the Holy Land of Ryne, I'd used continuous teleportation to catch up to her. This may sound like a pretty cowardly plan...but personally, I'd describe it as "careful." There was no need for me to put myself in any unnecessary danger.

This town was indeed a good place to get stronger, but the fact that this was a "holy land" was a little bit troublesome. I'd previously met a goddess, so I had no choice but to accept that the deity worshipped in this land probably existed too. It was annoying to be in a country that was so religiously devout.

I was aware that I broke a lot of this world's rules, and that this would make me a prime target for their deity. As much as I'd love to become enemies with them, though, there was no way I could fight one in my current situation. I'd already had a hard enough time against Aegiana, and she was a mere human.

That said, staying here for too long was dangerous, so I only planned to stay here for half a month or so. After that, I'd probably just go with the flow. I *had* a plan, though. I wasn't just playing this by ear. What's that, you say? The new demon king? Like I care. The hero army can have fun searching for that guy while we continue our journey.

As we continued walking down the street, we came across a rather large building.

"Oh, is this it?"

"This is my first time seeing a guild. However, it says, 'Adventurers' Guild: Regin Branch' in large letters on the front, so I assume it must be."

It was pretty nice, even if it wasn't too fancy or anything. It was mainly made from wood, but it was very well constructed, with a sort of medieval look to it. The entrance had double doors that were slightly larger than usual, and you could see the bar through the

window. It looked like a standard guild where people would gather to get drinks.

I wasn't looking to live out the dream of isekai manga or novels, but I couldn't help but feel kind of excited with the epitome of that kind of fantasy guild hall standing in front of me. Either way, it was time to get a start on the cliché scene: "Register at a guild and get harassed by thugs"!



A bell rang out as the doors opened. Light flowed into the room, along with a girl and a guy. The men around the bar sized them up. This was the remote town of Regin, in the Holy Land of Ryne. The majority of the adventurers here were skilled veterans. The adventurers who showed up here were usually the same few faces, but nobody knew the two who'd just walked in.

They didn't look like they wanted to hire adventurers. Their attire made it clear that they weren't normal individuals. They were equipped with some kind of magic tools, or at least that's what the adventurers guessed.

If they were carrying that kind of equipment, then they were either transfers from another town's guild, or they were here to register as new adventurers. The guy was a little taller than average, but not very muscular. The girl did not look suited to be an adventurer whatsoever—she was so dainty-looking. Then again, in this world, it was best not to judge a book by its cover. In the end, the most important thing was the strength of their magic tools and their skill in wielding them.

With the right equipment and skills, even this frail little girl could easily take out three adult men. There were more men than women in the guild, but there was still a decent amount of the latter. The number of female adventurers who were truly notable, though, could be counted on one hand.

There was a story passed down about the time when the previous generation of heroes had come to register at the guild, gotten harassed by thugs, and then completely taken out said thugs. And looking at the way these two were walking, it was clear they had battle experience under their belt. Because of that, there shouldn't have been anybody here who was foolish enough to go out of their way to repeat history...but the world is filled with idiots.

"Whoa there, girlie—do you know where you are? This ain't a market. Go do your shopping somewhere else."

The rest of those present were united in thinking that this person was an idiot. It was obvious that the pair were here to register at the guild.

“I’m not here to shop. I am an adventurer,” the girl replied curtly.

“Adventurer? *You*? Listen, girlie, hiding behind someone while they take out monsters and then claiming credit for yourself doesn’t make you an adventurer. You dumb?”

Like you’re one to talk, thought every other adventurer there.

The young man harassing them was a teammate of the skilled adventurer, Black Rose. Though they’d registered as adventurers at the same time, none of them had ever seen him defeat a monster by himself. He was just riding on Black Rose’s coattails, and hardly anyone considered him an adventurer.

Since he was with Black Rose, though, he’d gotten a big head, acting arrogantly and out of line. He was one of the things that the Regin Adventurers’ Guild was not very happy about.

The girl exhaled sharply and ignored his words. She’d apparently decided that it was better not to engage. However, that only served to further anger the young man.

“Hey, hold up! How dare you ignore me?! I’m with Black Rose, and you’re just a nobody!”

It was a pathetic taunt. Both the girl and guy ignored it, continuing on to the reception desk.

The young man clicked his tongue in annoyance. “You little shit! I’m gonna have to cut you down a peg for disrespecting me!” He put his hand on the girl’s shoulder, but that wasn’t enough to get her to turn around, so he tried to grab her white hair instead. But before he could, she moved forward, so his hand closed around air instead. “You think you can disrespect me like this...? I’m gonna show you a world of hurt!”

He balled his hand up into a fist and threw it at her. As soon as she saw this, though, she dodged it with superhuman speed. The spectating adventurers let out a sound, impressed. It seemed that she was very experienced with her magic tools.

“Wha— God dammit!” He tried to hit her again, but none of his blows came in contact with her.

She caught his fist in her hand effortlessly as he tried to throw another punch, then called out to the girl at the reception desk without taking her eyes off of him. “Are there rules against retaliation in this guild?” she asked.

“None at all,” said the girl at the desk. “Please be our guest. As long as your actions do not kill or cause severe harm, fights between guild members are permitted.”

Though it may have seemed barbaric, this was normal for a guild in a town far removed from civilization. A few scuffles here and there were par for the course in a place filled with bloodthirsty warriors.

“You heard her. Be sure to clench your teeth,” said the first girl

cutely, before her fist landed in his stomach faster than the eye could see.

The young man was sent flying across the room and landed on the floor with a thud. He was coughing up a storm, but it didn't seem as if he'd been injured too badly.

"For the record, I held back. Hmph. Be grateful."

The adventurers began to clap. It was a petty situation, but the girl's power was the real deal. The guild members were having a great time as they filled their bellies with drink. The only one who wasn't enjoying himself was the young man, who was clutching his stomach, completely red in the face and trembling with rage. He was the laughingstock of the guild—he'd been humiliated.

"That was a fluke! Let's take this outside, bitch!"

The young man didn't know when to quit. As he said this, though, the doors to the guild were flung open, and apart from the bell over the door, the guild fell silent. The one who'd entered was a woman wearing a black dress. She was the one that people knew as Black Rose.

She surveyed the room, looking at the young man on the ground and then at the white-haired girl. "I'm not sure what happened here, but I can guess," she said coldly, before bowing her head to the girl. "I sincerely apologize for my friend here."

The rest of the guild began buzzing from the scene of *the* Black Rose bowing her head to someone else. It'd been a week since she'd registered with the guild. Despite that, she'd shot up the rankings and earned herself a sort of fan club. The members of that fan club were now shooting hateful gazes at the young man for making their idol bow her head.

The girl stood there for a moment, dumbfounded, before her brain finally caught up to what was happening.

"O-Oh—you don't have to apologize! I don't mind at all. This was a good experience!"

"Is that so? I'm glad to hear that." Black Rose raised her head, and then bowed it again. "I apologize for the ruckus," she said, addressing everyone present.

"No, don't apologize!"

"It's not your fault, Black Rose!"

"That idiot should be apologizing!"

"I truly am sorry. I will need to reeducate him on his manners," said Black Rose, before easily lifting up the groaning young man.

She was about a hundred sixty centimeters tall versus his hundred and seventy, but she carried him with ease. It was a surreal image.

"Why is someone as great as you even with someone like that?!"

"You should ditch him already!"

The voices of the adventurers rang out around them.

Black Rose smiled wryly. "I would if I could, but...I guess you could say that we have a history." With those words, she carried the young man out of the guild house, leaving the white-haired girl stunned in her wake.

Black Rose walked to a deserted alleyway, whereupon she threw the young man to the ground.

"Wake up already. I know you're just pretending!"

"No, that actually kinda hurt... Oh, wait, are you mad?" asked the young man, jumping to his feet.

Black Rose let out an annoyed sigh. "Regardless of whether I'm angry or not, I'd like to ask what, exactly, you were thinking, Inori."

Inori smiled a little at Black Rose's—Ariya's—question. "Nobody did it when we registered, so I thought it'd be fun if we did it instead."

"That's all?"

"Yep." Inori was wearing a very satisfied smile.

"I'm sorry, but I think you need to be hit again," Ariya growled.

"Wait—calm down. If you hit me with my stats the way they are now, I'm gonna die!"

"All right—I'll settle for a kick then."

"That's worse! I *know* you're gonna aim for my balls! You want to practice what you saw a week ago!" Inori nervously watched Ariya as she began to swing her leg back and forth.

As if giving up, Ariya let out another sigh. "Please keep your fooling around to a minimum."

"What do you mean? I'm just getting started."

Ariya seriously considered hitting him.



Hey there—it's me again. Inori, your favorite protagonist. Remember me? I'm the guy who tried being on the other side of the new adventurer cliché and got knocked flat on my ass. Of course, I'd had no intention of taking that situation any further. Actually challenging them to a fight would've been more trouble than it was worth. All I'd wanted to do was confront them for the novelty of it. Thanks to Detect, I'd known that Ariya would be entering the guild hall soon and that she'd immediately shut down whatever I was doing.

One week had passed since we'd arrived in Regin. Since then, Ariya had earned herself the nickname of "Black Rose," hiding her full strength while still making a name for herself. Apparently, she even had her own fan club.

Personally, I felt that it'd be better if a former princess like her wasn't out in the open like this, but now that her hair had turned

black and her eyes red, there wasn't really a trace of who she used to be left. It was more than enough to have people second-guessing themselves. The fact that she'd become popular enough to have a fan club was proof enough that nobody recognized her. Then again, that could have been because we were in an area far removed from the Rising Sun Kingdom, and Ariya hadn't made too many public appearances in foreign countries, anyway.

She was also wearing the black dress that I'd crafted for her. That was where her nickname had come from. If rumors about her spread, people would only be talking about that dress, not her looks. With all this in mind, I was pretty confident that we could keep her identity a secret, bar anything *really* unexpected.

Well, enough about how Ariya'd been spending this past week. Let's get into what *I'd* been up to. Simply put, I'd been sleeping and drinking. Yep, that's right—I'd been living the life...during the day, at least. When night came, however, I'd slip into the shadows and leave to hunt. But despite my best efforts, I hadn't leveled up at all... *What the hell?!* I was used to leveling up fairly quickly, so this was weird to me. If only I could see how many experience points I needed for the next level. That would've cleared everything up.

Regarding my daytime activities, sleeping was necessary since I was a creature of the night. As for drinking, though, that wasn't because I was an alcoholic or anything. No—I had my own well-thought-out reasons. First of all, drinking was a good way to gather information, which was incredibly valuable. It was best to spend any idle time learning as much as I could. I didn't even need to drink with others. Thanks to my super hearing, I could catch any and all conversations happening around me.

The other reason why I drank was to gain debuff resistances. Every drink I ordered was the strongest that I could get my hands on. The toughest adventurers gathered in this place, and even the average person here could hold their liquor pretty well. Drinking the strongest stuff they had wasn't too far off from drinking poison, which was something I was more than happy to do since I wanted to level up Poison Resistance.

Sure, I was in pain at first, but now it was as effortless as drinking water. My Poison Resistance had reached level 5. *Not too shabby, if I do say so myself.* By the way, in this country you were considered an adult when you hit the age of sixteen, so I wasn't underage drinking. *Just* in case anyone was wondering...

Either way, that was how I'd ended up living the oh-so-luxurious life of just sleeping and day drinking. This had earned me a less than stellar reputation, though. Everyone saw me as Black Rose's flunky or her lackey, a drunkard, and a goblin.

As a reminder, “goblin” was short for a person who rides on the coattails of someone more successful. And even if I was the one defeating some of the monsters Ariya had to slay, I didn’t care too much about what people were calling me. I shoved all the annoying responsibilities that came with accepting jobs onto her, which meant that I could live a free life as an adventurer.

Today was another great day to be at the bar. Usually I drank alone, or with the other person that nobody really liked. They were kinda like my drinking buddy. However, they were nowhere to be seen, so instead I planned to enjoy a drink while the rest of the patrons talked shit about me from a distance. To be fair, I guess it’s hard to “enjoy” a drink when you’re not drinking something particularly tasty.

Unsurprisingly, when I entered the guild, I caught a lot of looks that seemed to be saying I had some nerve showing up after what I’d done yesterday. I didn’t blame them for it, but that didn’t stop me from glaring back at them either. I was really living out the small fry underling fantasy.

I put the mug to my lips and gulped down the liquid inside. It burned my throat on the way down, and the aftertaste was absolutely horrible too. This alcohol had no flavor—just pain. I slammed the tankard down on the table afterwards, then looked up at the young girl who’d sat down across from me.

“You’re back. Whaddya want?” As I addressed the girl I’d gotten involved with yesterday, I was only pretending to be in a bad mood.

She looked at me as one would a toy. It went without saying that her approaching me like this drew the gazes of everyone present.

“What do you say to becoming my pupil?”

Riiight... What the hell kinda suggestion is that? The people around us buzzed with confusion. It was only natural for them to react that way, watching this girl ask the thug who’d bothered her yesterday if he’d like to be her pupil. Did this girl have a few screws loose or something?



Although it was blatantly obvious that I was stunned into silence, she continued, unfazed. “You’re unpolished—lacking in both the physical and mental departments.” *I’m what now? Is she drunk?* “You might be stronger than the average person...but so’s any adventurer who uses magic tools. I can tell that there’s more to you, though. You have potential.” She looked straight at me. “I can tell from your eyes.” *Why do you look so proud? It’s creeping me out.* “You couldn’t react to my attack yesterday, but you *saw* it perfectly.”

She wasn’t wrong. With my Eye of True Vision, I could track anything with ease. I’d seen her attack, almost as if it were in slow motion, and beheld how powerful it looked as it struck me. I hadn’t expected her to notice that I’d perceived all that, though.

“You can’t really train your eyes to be faster. You can boost your reflexes with training or magic tools, but that won’t really do anything for your eyes.” She was obviously very excited about this...but I had no intention of becoming her pupil. There was no doubt she’d figure out I wasn’t who I pretended to be if I trained under her.

“Yeah, thanks, but no th—” I tried to flat-out refuse her offer but was interrupted by an adventurer sitting not too far from us.

“Listen up, goblin, this is a good opportunity for you. Why don’t you let her teach you an adventurer’s manners and some combat skills? You got knocked on your ass yesterday, remember? She’s way stronger than you.”

Everyone around us nodded in agreement. *Crap.* It was getting hard to say no. In that case, I had to change up my strategy.

“I’m already partnered with Black Rose. Sorry, but there isn’t much you can teach me.”

Her response was immediate. “Isn’t she busy all the time? I doubt she can help you that much.” *Did she do her homework before talking to me?* “I’ve got more time on my hands, so I can spend some of it tutoring you.”

Crap. I’m being backed into a corner. If Ariya were here, I could at least have her argue a little on my behalf, but she was taking care of a request. It was true that, as Black Rose, she didn’t have too much free time. Hm, maybe this was another problem I could just push onto Ariya? I decided that the best course of action was to put this matter on hold until she had time to take care of it.

Just as I had that thought, I noticed that the girl from the reception desk was coming over. She’d apparently caught wind of this conversation. *Oh, right—the guild wouldn’t approve of this!* I may not have been out on jobs with Ariya, but we were still party members. Stupid fistfights aside, it was against the rules to try to poach party members—especially by coercion, which this could fall under. The

guild would be on my side; they'd get me out of this situation!

"What a kind offer," said the girl from the reception desk. "Please do train him. I'll be sure to inform Ari."

Et tu, Brute?!

"Ari? Who's that?"

"Black Rose. It's her real name. This man here is our guild's greatest shame... All he's accomplished is loitering here and drinking all day. Usually we'd take matters into our own hands, but... Anyway, I know it's a lot to ask, but could we take you up on your offer?"

"*Real name*"? No, *her real name is Ariya*. Of course, we weren't going to use our *real* names here, so Ariya had instead gone with the fake name she'd used in the past.

"Please forgive me for being so forward, but I believe a Holy Knight such as yourself will be able to straighten him out in both body and mind. On behalf of the guild, I'd like to make a formal request of you. I do hope you'll accept it."

Oh, she's a Holy Knight? I guess we are in a holy land. I'd heard about them in the course of my information gathering. I had more pressing matters to think about, though—I needed to figure out a way out of this.

"Sure thing! Excited to be working with you!" She stuck her hand out to me.

I felt the angry gazes of the adventurers on me. As their eyes bored holes into me they were practically screaming that I'd better not turn her down. *Yep, this is checkmate*. I was already one step away from becoming a total outcast. If I declined now, I'd cross that line, and then I'd really be screwed.

"Fine..." Reluctantly, I shook her hand. I really wanted to ask her why she couldn't tell I was just a normal human at the moment. Of course, I was amazing—just not right this second. *I'm really powerful at night, okay?! This isn't sour grapes!*

"What?! You haven't been to the church yet?! That's blasphemous," she exclaimed. Her reaction to this revelation was rather exaggerated. *Can you blame me, though? I don't need anything from the church, so why would I go there?*

From her explanation, it was customary for all travelers to stop by the church to pray when arriving in a new town. It was such common knowledge that I'd never heard anyone explicitly talking about it. It was kinda like how people visited shrines in Japan.

"Okay, change of plans. First stop is the church!"

"What does this have to do with being an adventurer?"

"It's for mental training! If we're going to build up your mind, purifying your spirit with prayer is the best way to go!"

That's a very Holy Knight thing to say. It was then that I decided I'd call her Sister Sensei. I wasn't very interested in setting foot in the church, but I didn't really have a choice, so I obediently followed her as she led the way.

Sister Sensei was a little shorter than Ariya, but not by much. Oh, interesting fact—units of measurement were the same in this world as they were in Japan. So if we told people here that Ariya was a hundred sixty centimeters tall, they'd understand. *Thank you to whoever's responsible for that.*

Sister Sensei was a beautiful girl whose standout features were her white hair and her clear, blue eyes. Her attire seemed to be a nun's habit with some armor on top of it. It was hard to tell what her body looked like because of the armor, but it didn't seem like she had much going for her in the breast department.

Her skin was so light it was almost reflective, and her waist and wrists were so thin that it made me wonder if she could really fight, even with the help of magic tools. She just seemed so...dainty. I couldn't imagine her pretty, thin fingers holding a weapon. Maybe she made up for it with protective magic?

The nape of her neck was exposed through gaps in her armor. It was pale and beautiful, and thoroughly stimulated my appetite. Also, her scent made me almost certain she was a virgin. *Do nuns in this world have to be virgins too?*

As if suddenly remembering something, she turned to me. "Oh, hey, what's your name?"

"Shouldn't you introduce yourself first?"

"Wait, haven't I? Hm... I guess not."

Even if she does, she's still going to be Sister Sensei to me.

"I'm Fanatique—a Holy Knight of Ryne. You can just call me Fana."

"Kiri." *Obviously, that's my fake name.* It came from a different reading of the characters in my Japanese name. There was no way that people in a different world would catch on, especially since, for a lot of Japanese people, it wouldn't be natural to read my name like that at all. "So, what exactly is a Holy Knight?"

"Huh? You don't know?"

"Yeah, I'm not from around here. I've only heard of you guys. I don't know what you do."

It would've been nice if there was a library or something around here. Books must've been a rare commodity, because I barely saw any. Thanks to that, I had to rely on hearsay, which didn't give me the same juicy details a book would. Now that I had the real deal in front of me, though, I could get the valuable information I needed straight from the horse's mouth for free.

“Hm, let’s see... Put simply, I’m a priestess who can fight. I offer prayers to our god and slay monsters and demons.” *As expected.* “I guess there’s some other stuff I do, but that’s the gist of it. Anyway, we’re here!”

I looked up at Sister Sensei’s behest. Before us stood a grand building. Its spires had a unique, eye-catching design. It wasn’t as fancy as a castle, but it was obviously rather different from the other buildings in this town.

The building consisted of arch-like structures and resembled the architecture seen in medieval Europe. It had been constructed with white bricks, which were laid very snugly against each other. However, though the entire building was uniformly white, the ornate carvings on its pillars and arches still provided visual interest.

I’d seen it from a distance a bunch of times, but this was my first time seeing it up close. I was honestly impressed.

“I’ll show you the proper etiquette, so just follow my lead. Let’s go!”

I’m surprised by how much responsibility she’s taking for me. I entered the church after her, taking care not to breach etiquette. In the chapel, there was a statue of a beautiful lady. If I had to guess, it was the goddess they revered. Next to that statue were two comparably smaller ones.

There were no benches or chairs in the chapel. The floor was made of marble, or some other kind of beautiful stone. The chapel was lit faintly by rays of the sun that came through the skylight. There wasn’t a single speck of dust or dirt—they must’ve been thorough with their cleaning.

People prayed while standing up, and apparently it didn’t really matter where in the chapel you prayed. There were a decent amount of people here, but since the chapel was so tall, it didn’t feel crowded. The craftsmanship of the arches and pillars here wasn’t as good as that of the ones outside, and their graven images depicted various mythical scenes.

“Very well—I will now instruct you on the proper way to pray.” The way she was speaking to me had changed so much, I was tempted to comment on it. Instead, I silently nodded.

The chapel was quiet, and even the smallest noise reverberated across the dome. Sister Sensei herself spoke in a very quiet voice. Most likely, her new tone was the way that nuns were supposed to speak.

“Straighten your back and place your hands firmly together. Close your eyes, spread your fingers, and commence your prayer. It should last around ten seconds. When you are finished, kiss the tip of your middle finger.” As she explained, she demonstrated each step.

I already kind of knew how to pray from what I’d read about it.

Apparently, each finger was associated with a different element. In order, starting from the thumb, they represented earth, fire, light, wind, and water. By spreading your fingers, you demonstrated your devotion to each of those five gods. By kissing the middle finger, you showed that you were praying to the chief god—the goddess of light.

Dark was said to be the element of demons, so by an unspoken rule, it was generally ignored. *Nobody wants to talk about how people with an affinity for light also have an affinity for dark? No? Okay.*

“Why don’t you give it a try?”

“Okay.” I nodded and attempted to mimic what she’d done. I straightened my back—well, kinda—put my hands together, closed my eyes, and spread my fingers. I’d always found it ironic that my name, Inori, can mean “pray,” but I neither believed in God nor prayed at all. This might have been my first time praying, actually. Also, I probably shouldn’t have been thinking about other stuff when I was supposed to be praying.

Closing my eyes made the silence of the chapel more obvious. Even my ears, enhanced by Detect, could only pick up the slightest of sounds being made. I didn’t care much about deities, but I was really digging the silence. It made me feel extremely relaxed.

But also...what was this strange feeling? It’s not like I was a believer. I was only going through the motions, but I still felt like my soul was being connected to the heavens. Why was that? On a whim, I decided to use Detect to search the area. There wasn’t anything out of the ordinary, physical or magical. So was that connection all in my head? But my instincts were never really wrong...

Maybe it wasn’t exactly a *connection* that I was sensing. It felt more one-sided... Like I was being searched. Wait, was someone searching me? I didn’t care who they were. They had the nerve to try and peer into my soul! Anger swelled in my gut. *How dare you touch me without my permission. Screw you!*

“*I dunno who you are, but you better stop.*” I tried to imagine the connection to me and then reject it with the force of my will. I thought I heard the sound of something snapping, and then suddenly it was gone.

I opened my eyes, falling out of my state of concentration. Waiting for me was Sister Sensei, her eyes glowing with pride.

“You must be more devout than I thought. That was a very fervent prayer!” she exclaimed—quietly, so that only I could hear.

Had she not felt the same thing I did? I surveyed the people around us, but all I saw were people with their eyes closed in prayer. Nothing was out of the ordinary.

Afterwards, I left the church with Sister Sensei. Everything seemed

normal, and it was as if the weird feeling I'd had was just a dream. I was sure it was real, though. Someone had tried to search me. But who? And why? The method they'd used wasn't something that Detect could pick up on.

The church itself was probably not capable of something like that. Just in case, I'd Appraised everyone there, but there wasn't anyone suspicious. The only ways to beat a Divine Blessing like Detect were to have the same Divine Blessing, an Artifact, or a magic tool that the mage from the previous generation of heroes had made. And it still wouldn't have been easy. Apart from that, the only other possibility was...God.

This was just a theory, but was it possible that a god or two used the church as a way to peer into the world and investigate it? What if they used the information they gained to manage the world? I had no proof or information about this being the case, but it was certainly possible. My instincts were pointing me in that direction as well.

If I was right, it'd mean that the gods used churches as a way to search the hearts of the people who visited them. That could be a problem. If they really did connect to everyone who prayed to them in the chapel, that'd mean they might pay more attention to me, since I'd disrupted their connection.

Then again, if I'd really managed to cut their connection, then they probably hadn't gotten any information on me. Thinking about it like that, I felt as if I'd made the right decision. Either way, there was no way for me to have known how the church worked before going there. It was better that I'd learned about it sooner rather than later.

On the other hand, it would've been nice to make contact with them later rather than sooner. I was still weak, and I had a feeling that, one day, I'd have to seriously face the gods of this world. Or at least that was what my instincts were telling me—and when had they ever been wrong?



“Hm... How boring...” Such was the complaint of a woman in this clear blue space.

It was clear she was not human. Her body was a blue color, reminiscent of jelly or holy water. She was lying back after having decided to take a break from her paperwork. Humans called her the goddess of water, and she was one of the goddesses of this world. She served the chief god, observing the mundane world.

However, she wasn't the only god entrusted with this task. She was one of many who'd been selected for this work. Though she had no problem with being a desk jockey for the chief god, it certainly gave her pause to realize that an all-powerful god like her was doing

something as dull as paperwork. It was only natural to feel a little peeved, especially after repeating the same routine, day after day, for tens of thousands of years. No matter how mind-numbing the work was, though, she was able to keep it together due to the mental fortitude she received from her divinity.

However, that seemingly endless routine had ended not with a bang, but with a small snap.

“Huh?”

Someone in the Holy Land of Ryne had forcefully cut her connection. This should have been impossible for a normal human. It was a feat only possible for one who had extreme mental fortitude. Whoever it was, they were a threat.

As soon as she had determined that, she began a careful examination of all the information she’d obtained. It wasn’t much, but it was still enough to surprise her.

“*Eight* different world factors?!”

This was beyond abnormal. Humans were the creations of god, and should have only possessed one world factor. In very rare cases, when the human soul was reincarnated or summoned as a hero, they ended up possessing two world factors at most. However, eight was absolutely unheard of.

Disregarding the “how” of it, crossing world lines was extremely hard on the human soul, as the process chipped away at the traveler’s very existence. Journeying to a new world would already take everything a person had, so subsequent trips should have been impossible.

She heavily doubted the information that lay before her, but since it had come from divine power, it was absolute. It was impossible for there to have been any mistakes. At last, the goddess of water landed on a certain thought.

“The chief god mentioned something about a distortion... Could this possibly have been what she was talking about?”

Either way, she needed to report this, so she made a direct, emergency connection to the chief god.

“What is it? Has something happened, goddess of water?” The voice that answered was beautiful, and as much as the goddess of water wanted to admire it, she hadn’t the time.

“I’ve discovered a human with eight world factors.”

“What?!”

The goddess of water shared what little information she had, as well as her theory.

“This all sounds rather improbable but...not impossible. What is this human’s name?”

“Please hold a moment... Got it. His name is Inori Takafuji.”

“Hm... I feel as though I’ve heard this name recently.” The chief god thought deeply, and then something popped up in her mind. “Oh, yes! Someone gave testimony regarding this individual during the Lie Veracity test using the divine tool.”

“The Lie Veracity test you are referring to is the one conducted by the Maccad Empire with their divine tool, yes?”

“Indeed. According to the testimony, Inori Takafuji was summoned from his world as a hero. He was the *fourth* hero summoned to the Rising Sun Kingdom—in other words, an error.”

“I’m impressed by how you are able to recall all these details about such an insignificant person. You’ve truly earned the title of chief god.”

“Oh, no—I have a cheat sheet.”

The goddess of water fell silent at the chief god’s honesty. At first, she’d been taken aback, but then she couldn’t help but admire how the chief god neither put on airs nor felt the need to lie. The chief god was someone she admired from the bottom of her heart. There was no other god capable of keeping the world balanced like she did. To her, the chief god was *the* absolute existence.

“The testimony said that he perished. I suppose he’s still alive?” the chief god remarked.

“The divine tool was wrong? That’s not possible!”

“Not necessarily. The statement was that the *human* known as Inori Takafuji had perished. If he is not human, then the statement is true.”

The very little information that they had didn’t specify Inori’s race. This insignificant existence was certainly crafty. Though she’d never met him before, the goddess of water was beginning to hate him.

“What should we do? If he is the source of the distortion, then we must eliminate him. Shall we dispatch the goddess of fire? We’ve no idea of his abilities, so sending her would be the safe option,” the goddess of water suggested.

“No.” The chief goddess immediately rejected this idea. “The goddess of fire is only allowed to deal with those from other worlds who would hinder us. Direct interference with the mundane world would be overstepping her bounds.”

“Then should we leave him be?”

“No.” The chief goddess chuckled. “We simply require a more indirect method. We need only make sure that we don’t get our hands dirty.”

As she realized what the chief god meant, the goddess of water began to smile.





“All righty—let’s start training!” said Sister Sensei, folding her arms and puffing out her chest.

For the record, at that moment I was kneeling on the ground. *Why?* After leaving the church, she’d said that we were going to train, and brought me to an empty lot behind the church. Though we were still technically on church property, it was apparently left unused because there had been a setback in designing the building, leaving this space undeveloped.

The ground was bare and deserted, so the area was quiet. It was honestly perfect for training.

“Okay—how about we get things started by having you show me your magic tools?” She asked me this as if it were the most natural thing in the world. And it should’ve been, but...

“Don’t got any.”

“Pardon?”

“I don’t have any magic tools.”

Her face was frozen into a smile. *Looking at me like that won’t magically put some into my possession, lady.*

“O-Oh... I get it. You left them at home?”

“No. I can’t use magic tools. Why would I carry around things that I can’t use?”

Sister Sensei froze up again. This made it really clear that it was unthinkable for adventurers in this world to not be able to use magic tools. Maybe I should’ve kept the fact that I couldn’t use them to myself, but that probably wouldn’t have been a good move. If she was so hell-bent on being my teacher, then she would’ve found out eventually, anyway. In that case, it was better to be upfront about it.

“Wait... So you’ve been working as an adventurer this entire time, *without* magic tools? Oh— I guess you have Black Rose with you, so you’d probably never be in too much danger.”

“I’m a scout. I’m good at being stealthy and exploring. I use those skills to get by.” *I don’t have to tell her about my Divine Blessing, especially since that’d instantly flag me as a hero. I can’t let that slip.*

“I see... Hm? But wouldn’t that still put you in danger? You’d be going off on your own, without any magic tools or combat ability. That’s dangerous, especially in a remote place like this.”

“And that’s why I don’t go anywhere. I just stay inside and drink.” *Not something I should admit so openly, I guess.*

“But if you’re an adventurer, you *have* to go out every now and then, don’t you? Maybe you were okay those few times that you *did* go out, but at this rate you’re just asking for trouble. Who knows—there

might be a situation where you're forced to go it alone. Yeah, you're definitely in danger. I need to make sure you're combat ready." Sister Sensei nodded, agreeing with herself, and leaving me no opportunity to interrupt. "So I'm gonna whip you into shape. Hm, let's start with..."

Sister Sensei turned around, beginning to ponder how best to train me. "Wait... Am I allowed to train someone without magic tools? Our training as Holy Knights began with magic tools, but..." *You might be trying to whisper, but I can totally hear you.* "No, wait. If he's gonna have to fight monsters anyway, I just have to make him strong enough to be able to hold his ground against them without magic tools." *Uh, no, you wait.* "In that case, it shouldn't matter if he uses magic tools or not. I can stick to my original training plan." *Wait, what? Are you crazy?* "Kiri!"

"Yeah?"

"I know how we're gonna train."

"Cool. Can we do something different?"

"Huh? Why? You don't even know what we're gonna do."

I know it's gonna be a muscle-murdering training course. Do you understand what it means to not be able to use magic tools? Do you want me to die?

"Sheesh... That attitude is exactly what got you into this situation in the first place. If you tried to run *towards* your problems instead of *away* from them, you'd be a lot better off. As your teacher, I'm not gonna let you slack off." *This isn't me slacking off. This is me listening to my survival instincts.* "So with that said, we're gonna start by sparring. I wanna see what you've got."

I stared at her in disbelief. *Seriously?* Even that muscle-head Aegiana Itze had started with muscle training. This girl wanted to start by *sparring* with me?

"Okay, Kiri—here I come!"

"W-Wait— I— Oof!"

One hour later, I burst into the guild hall and ran to the bar. Spotting my drinking buddy, I joined him at his table.

"Hey."

"Oh, it's you." The old man slowly turned to face me. His entire body was covered by a thin, dirty robe. Though his hood covered most of his face, it didn't completely cover his unkempt beard. "Heard you got yourself a teacher. Shouldn't you be training?" he asked, in a deep voice.

"You heard right. So about that— Oh, I'll take the usual." As I sat down across from him, I placed my order. Though I received a disapproving look, the server accepted it all the same.

No matter how much I protested, Sister Sensei did not budge on her training regimen...which was the exact same training we would've done if I'd had magic tools. How stupid was she? This wasn't Sparta. She was asking for the impossible. I seriously doubted the guild lady's judgment if she'd thought that Sister Sensei would make a suitable teacher.

Eventually, when she'd taken a bathroom break, I'd escaped.

"And that's what happened," I explained.

"Heh... Sounds rough."

"'Rough' doesn't even begin to cover it. I almost resigned myself to death multiple times today." *I probably wouldn't have actually died, though, since she was holding back in her own way.*

"Gotta say," the old man went on, "I don't really like how people just assume that fighting's gotta be done with magic tools."

"Oh? Whaddya mean by that?"

For some reason, everyone in the guild hated this old guy. No matter how packed the guild was, nobody would ever join him at his table, or even sit at the tables around him. That's how much they hated him. When he approached the girl at the reception desk, she'd shoot him a death glare, so apparently the people running the guild hated him too.

I had to assume that something had happened in the past—something I hadn't heard about. I didn't even know his name, and he probably didn't know my name either. All I did know was that I liked being around him. There weren't others nearby, and nobody came up to talk to us, so it was nice and quiet. I didn't hate him, and he didn't hate me. I was more than happy to sit at the same table and drink with him.

Because everyone hated him, though, he always went on jobs by himself. The fact that his rating was stable meant that he was decently strong.

"Magic tools can be unwieldy," said the old man. "If your strength is in your magic tools, then you gotta wear them all the time."

"Uh-huh."

"What happens when you gotta take them off, though? You'd be helpless."

"Uh-huh."

Did this mean that adventurers had to be wary of attacks even in their own beds? Had he come under such an attack before? I was really starting to get interested in his history.

"You have to worry *that* much?" I asked.

"That...and more. There are times when you gotta disengage your weapons. You've gotta make sure you yourself have enough power to deal with the situation even if you can't rely on your tools."

That's a good argument. I'm gonna use it when I see Sister Sensei again. Just as my drink was brought to me, the doors to the guild house were flung open. It was Sister Sensei, who stood there looking around restlessly until her eyes landed on me.

"Kiri! I knew you'd be here! Why'd you run away?"

Didn't think I'd see her again so soon.

"Ugh... Who's *that*?" Sister Sensei said in a low voice, stiffening at the sight of the old guy next to me.

Impressive. He's good enough to make someone hate him without even having met him. Was it the smell? I wasn't sure if that was it, though, because my sense of smell was enhanced thanks to Detect, and he still just smelled like a normal old man to me.

Moving away from him, she pulled on my arm. "Come on, let's get back to training."

"No! That's not training! It's cruel and unusual bullying!"

As much as I screamed and struggled, the other adventurers didn't move a muscle to help me. Maybe they didn't want to get close to the old guy, but it definitely seemed like they thought I was getting what I deserved. How could they be so heartless?

"This old guy told me that assuming that all battles are fought with magic tools will land me in a world of hurt when I'm attacked without them! I request a revision of the training regimen!" I decided to wield the argument I'd heard earlier.

For a second, I thought it had worked because she stopped pulling on me. Then, in the next second, she began pulling on my arm again.

"Mm, you're not wrong...but that's for people who can actually fight, right? You can't even do that, so I need to teach you how to fight first. Besides, you can't use magic tools anyway, can you?"

She has a point. I hadn't expected her to counter my valid argument with one of her own. *Damn—my plan failed.* I looked at the old guy, silently requesting his help, but he looked away, sipping at his drink instead. *Et tu, Brute?!!! (Round 2: Electric Brutaloo.)*

"Come on, let's get going!"

"W-Wait! You're gonna break my arm! Agh—my arm!" I could feel the joints of my arm about to break. If she had used her magic tools, I had no doubt that my arm would have snapped. Just as I was thinking about how to get out of this, the bell over the guild doors jingled again.

"Kiri, we have a job. Let's... Uh, what are you doing?" said Ariya as she came in. *Godlike timing!*

"Ari! Save me from this hell!"

"'Hell'? That's mean!" Sister Sensei protested.

"Seriously... What's going on?"

It made sense that Ariya wouldn't be able to make heads or tails

of the current situation. Yesterday's "victim" had become today's "perpetrator."

"Did Kiri cause trouble again?" She phrased this as a question, but she acted like she already knew the answer. It was obvious she had no faith in me.

The girl at reception ran over to her. "Apologies, Ari. Please allow me to explain."

While my joints creaked threateningly, the girl from the guild explained what had happened.

"Pupil?" Ariya asked. She probably understood that a master-pupil relationship like this was very risky for me. She glanced at Sister Sensei, who was gripping my arm, before speaking again. "Miss Fanatique, I appreciate your enthusiasm, but I believe this is a problem for me. I'm responsible for—"

"But it doesn't look like you've been able to train him properly," she said bluntly. The way they were arguing over me made this feel like a parental dispute. "I think I can take good care of him, and I see no disadvantages for you."

It felt like sparks were flying between them. Was this one of those fabled catfights? *Scary. Can you at least let go of my arm first? I swear my elbow's gonna break in five seconds.*

"I'll be sure that he doesn't have any more immature outbursts...so why don't you back off for now?"

"Are you really that attached to him? Oh, wait—is that because you're in love with him?"

Time appeared to freeze. The flow of the conversation had taken us in a very weird direction.

"Excuse me...?"

"Well, you're basically financially supporting him. Plus, you're always defending him. You also mentioned that you two have *history*."

"There are no romantic feelings between myself and Ino—Kiri..."

Yeah, if anything, we only think about killing each other.

"Then I don't see the problem with me toughening him up a bit," Sister Sensei said, pulling my arm. *Crap, it's really bending. Oh, god, it's gonna snap!*

"Well..."

"Guys don't like clingy girls."

"We aren't like that!" Ariya, *don't fall for her game. Hurry up and save my elbow... Wait, no—get me out of this training relationship!*

"Jealous? It's okay, I only want him as a pupil. I'm not after him romantically. I'm a Holy Knight, after all."

"Urgh! Fine! Do as you want!"

Et tu, Brute?!?!? (For the third time...)

"Awesome! Now that we have everyone's approval, let's get back

to training, my pupil!”

“W-Wait! Seriously, wait! It’s gonna break!”

“If it breaks, I’ll just heal you. All good!”

“There’s nothing *good* about that!”

Thus, I was dragged off kicking and screaming by Sister Sensei.



Maccad Empire, Emperor’s Office

The sound of a stamp being pressed down and the scratching of a pen rang out through the room, which was seemingly isolated from the world. Beyond the window lay a very geometrically arranged courtyard, filled with greenery. The warm rays of the sun shone in through the window. The temperature of the room was perfect with the help of a magic tool and the volume of the sound filtering in from outside was also perfect. The room came equipped with many different functions, but the emperor favored its soundproofing the most. The entire room could have been considered a magic tool, and it had been crafted by the world’s most skilled magic tool user.

There was a knock at the heavy wooden doors.

“Who’s there?”

“Indera Djenda, sir.”

“Enter.”

“Thank you.” She bowed as she came into the room, approaching the desk where the emperor was seated.

“Here are the materials regarding the former Rising Sun Kingdom’s territories,” she said, handing a heavy stack of bound papers to him. Despite its thickness, it wasn’t as bad as it could have been. Due to how busy the emperor was, it was her job as the chancellor to filter out unnecessary information for him.

“Hm...” The emperor put his hand to his chin, reading the documents silently.

They contained basic information, such as updates on the production of crops and magic tools, the current state of the economy, and the positions of the various lords within their territories. It was all necessary to enable governance.

However, what he was reading now was very different from the information the Maccad Empire had previously received. The Maccad Empire had had a spy in the Rising Sun Kingdom, so they’d been able to collect information on their own—information that was perhaps even more accurate than what they’d received from the various lords in the Rising Sun Kingdom. Regardless, it didn’t contradict the official information they received.

However, it wasn’t that which caught his eye. Rather, it was the results of the investigation into the person who’d attacked the castle.

Due to the fire, all of the evidence and everyone who could've given testimony aside from the heroes had been destroyed or killed. From the small scraps of evidence that they were able to recover, they'd learned that a third party—a new demon king—had most likely been responsible for it all.

“The corpses of the royal family were not found.”

“More specifically, they could not be identified due to the intensity of the flames. It is unclear whether they are alive or dead, but...”

Judging from what had happened, it would've been easy to determine that they'd died. According to the statements of the heroes, the king and queen were most definitely dead. The lords had also backed this up by saying that Bitrei had been targeting the royal family. Most likely, the second princess had also died in the castle.

The castle also had a hidden passageway, but all they found within it were the burned corpses of soldiers who had been lying there in wait. Thus, it was very difficult to imagine that the second princess had survived.

The emperor tilted his head. “These flames are a little too convenient, don't you think?”

“How so?”

“It's almost as if someone was using them to erase evidence. It's not something demons would do.”

“But according to Ryuto's testimony—”

“I know. But still...” He trailed off, collecting his thoughts before confirming something with Indera. “Has the castle been left as it was?”

“Yes—we have preserved the scene as best as we could.”

“Good. Then let's have the Traveling Noble investigate.”

“Sir... Are you certain?” At first, Indera was surprised, but she understood. The Noble was the best magic tool engineer in the world. But also...

“The Noble has met the second princess before. Perhaps that person may be able to find something. Make contact immediately,” the emperor commanded.

“Yes, sir.”

The gears of the story Inori had thought concluded were, unbeknownst to him, turning once again.

Chapter 2

“Time to let loose! Death to trash!”

Hello again—it’s your favorite protagonist, Inori. At this moment, I was venting my stress from my training session in the afternoon. It had already been a few days since my training with Sister Sensei had begun, and the amount of mental and physical exhaustion I was experiencing from that was *juuust* super. I was completely and utterly pooped.

Put simply, here was how the past few days had gone: Sister Sensei would drag me off, I’d get beaten to a pulp, I’d pass out from exhaustion, and then by the time I woke up, it’d be night. At which point I’d find it impossible to fall asleep again, so I’d be sleep-deprived when morning came. Yes—I was sleep-deprived. Vampires didn’t get sleepy at night, so I got the same feeling as being hopped up on coffee. *Holy hell, am I tired. This is all her goddamn fault!*

As usual, I’d slipped away by jumping from shadow to shadow before using Teleport to get out of the town entirely. I was earlier than usual, though, so I didn’t see Ariya on my way out. I was desperate to blow off some steam by hunting monsters. Leveling up Sexual Prowess would just have to wait. *Good for you, Ariya. You don’t have to go to bed on the verge of passing out tonight.* My Sexual Prowess was currently level 5.

My own personal perception of the strength of Skills based on their levels went like this: levels 1 and 2 were “beginner,” 3 and 4 were “intermediate,” 5 and 6 were “advanced,” 7 and 8 were “master,” and 9 and 10 were “godlike.”

In essence, this meant I was “advanced” when it came to Sexual Prowess, but “godlike” when it came to Dropkick, Bite, and Leap. What did it mean to have a godlike dropkick, though?

Well, enough about my Skills; it was time to get to monster hunting. The only problem was...my level still had yet to go up, and I had no idea why. Was my Growth Boost on vacation? Did it take a shitload more EXP to get to level 15? Couldn’t they at least show me my experience bar in my stat sheet or something? Honestly, though, even if I couldn’t level up, it wasn’t a huge problem. There wasn’t really anything I could do about it right now, anyway. I needed to focus on what I *could* do, and that was taking down monsters, sucking their blood, and raising my stats. I had no problems getting *that* done.

My Eye of True Sight caught a glimpse of a monster far in the distance. It was pretty awesome that I had this eye because without it, I wouldn't have been able to spot the monster without getting a whole lot closer. From what I could tell, it was a skeleton monster. Given that this was such a remote area that barely anyone came to, there was bound to be a corpse or two lying around, and that pointed to the presence of the undead.

Even with my Baron-Class Authority, I couldn't control it, and that was despite having been able to control the ghouls during the coup. This must have been because my ability to control the undead had come from a different world. I could control any undead that *I* had created in this world, but not those that had been created by others.

Because of that, my Authority felt kinda pointless, especially since it wasn't increasing at all. How long was I supposed to stay Baron-Class? Was it even possible for me to raise my Authority? Maybe it could only be done through a process specific to the world that had bestowed my vampirism on me. *This blows*. But whatever. My frustration with that could wait—the skeleton came first. I already had a decent idea what kind of monster it was from its equipment, but I still decided to use Appraisal.

No Name / Undead Monster (Skeleton Mage)
HP: 50/50 / MP: 1580/1580 / STR: 50
VIT: 93 / DEX: 452 / AGI: 65 / INT: 1023
Divine Blessing(s): None
Titles: None

Yep, just as I thought. I mean, what else could it have been? It was a skeleton with a frickin' staff. Then again, there *had* been a skeleton that had tried to whack me with a mage's staff once. Apparently, even the world of the undead had its muscleheads.

All the same, I was grateful for monsters with high MP and INT. Of course, I still wanted to train my AGI, but the more MP I had, the more times I could teleport in a row. And the more INT I had, the more things I could control at a time with Puppet Master. Both of these were incredibly important to me.

Detect confirmed that, apart from me and the skeleton mage, there weren't any other monsters or humans in the area. Additionally, I was still a safe distance away from it. Usually, I'd be much more methodical and strategic about taking out a monster...but I was here to blow off some steam. I was gonna blow right through it. Screw plans!

According to Absolute Measurement, a thousand five hundred and twenty-three meters separated us. It would take six seconds for me to

close the distance between us. I went into a crouching start and kicked off of the ground. With each second, I moved faster, until I was moving at subsonic speed, the environment around me whipping past.

By the time the skeleton mage noticed me, it was too late. Its face quickly became acquainted with my fist. Its skull practically exploded, shattering to pieces with multiple satisfying cracks. *Man, I feel so much better!*

“Did that do it?” I wondered aloud, purposely trying to jinx the situation. I slowed down and turned around. “Oh. That *did* do it...”

The skeleton mage’s skull was lying in pieces. The rest of its bones had also been scattered about by the force of my blow. That made sense—after all, it was just a squishy magic user. I felt so let down, but regardless, I began to collect all the bones so that I could suck the skeleton’s blood. *Hm? How am I supposed to suck blood from a skeleton?* Fear not—there was a way!

First, I took the bone that looked like the thing’s femur and split it vertically with my knife. It wasn’t easy, but I managed. Cracking open the bone revealed the marrow. It wasn’t red or fluid anymore due to its skeletonization, but it still counted as blood. I scooped it out with my knife and chowed down. It had a rich flavor, perhaps because of the high amount of mana in it. Either way, it was delicious—maybe enough for it to be called a delicacy.

I couldn’t finish it all in one sitting, though, so I decided to save the rest in Shadow Storage for the time being while looking for my next prey.

Suddenly, a woman’s charming voice rang out. “Well, someone seems to be having fun.”

I used Detect immediately, but as expected, I didn’t find anything or anyone out of the ordinary within its decently large range. Either the individual who had spoken was a significant distance away from me, or they were communicating without using magic...but neither of those options was possible.

“Aw, did I scare you? Heh heh.”

What’s so funny? “Where are your manners? You can’t just call out to people like that.” I made sure to keep my voice level in order to mask my surprise.

“Oh, dear me. My apologies. Allow me to introduce myself. I’m Furuth. Nice to meet you!”

“Hard to ‘meet’ someone I can’t see.”

“You’re not going to tell me your name?”

“I’m not ballsy enough to introduce myself to someone I don’t see.”

“What a shame. Couldn’t you just let this slide? I have some things to take care of before I can show myself.”

As our conversation continued, I racked my brain for ideas. From the way she spoke, I could perhaps assume that she wasn't able to read my mind. Detect also hadn't worked on her. Suddenly, I remembered what had happened at the church. *There's no way this is a servant of god or something, right? She's a little too friendly for that.*

"Whatever. I'm more interested in the trick you're using. Couldn't care less about your name."

"Trick? Oh—you mean the way I'm talking to you?"

"I don't sense any kind of magic being used or anyone near me. Mind telling me how you're doing this?"

"You can detect that kinda stuff? Not bad... But then you don't know about *this*?"

Hm? From the way she'd phrased that, whatever she was doing might not have been all that rare.

"Well..." she went on, "I guess there aren't many humans who can use Spirit Magic, so maybe that's to be expected."

"Spirit Magic?" I asked. "Also... 'human'?"

Given that I'd been on the receiving end of her questions ever since she'd forcefully started this conversation with me, she could bear fielding one measly question from me.

"Yes. I'm an elf, and I'm using Spirit Magic to speak with you. More specifically, I asked the wind spirits to carry my voice to you."

She's using spirits, and she's an elf. There were barely any humans who were able to perceive or communicate with spirits. Thanks to that, I hadn't found any writings on the subject. But still, was Spirit Magic something I couldn't perceive with Detect? Was the thing I'd sensed back at the church also Spirit Magic? No—that had felt completely different from anything that existed in this dimension. *That's just my instinct, though.*

"Sounds pretty handy. Wanna teach me?"

"You're human, aren't you? You need to be able to see or speak to spirits first. I don't think you can do it."

"I'd love to be able to see 'em. Where are they?"

"I think you misunderstand me. Spirits are everywhere. They're in the air, the water, and in the ground itself. They may have different elemental affinities, but they are *everywhere*."

Hm, I see... Spirits are all around us. If that was the case, then yeah, Detect definitely wasn't picking them up. I was starting to value the Skill a little less. If it got any more unreliable than this, I'd probably have to lump it in with my useless Skills.

On the other hand, maybe the reason Detect hadn't picked up on them was because they were so abundant. It was probably hard to distinguish a single spirit from the rest of the world—kinda like looking for a contact lens in the middle of an ocean. *Hm, or maybe not*

quite like that. Anyway, it was entirely possible that I'd been detecting them this entire time; I just hadn't been able to distinguish them as separate entities.

Detect allowed me to sense not only life signals, but mana, the ground, the air, and even water. Maybe this entire time I thought I'd been sensing land structures, but I was actually sensing spirits. That was a possibility. At the very least, it was worth investigating.

"Mind if I ask a few questions of my own?" she said.

Regardless, I'd have to save my research for later. I needed to deal with this bitch first.

"Hm? Did you just have a rude thought?"

"Just your imagination."

"I'm not sure I believe you...but all right. You were just eating that skeleton, were you not?" She knew. She'd seen me. This could be bad. I needed to find her and shut her up fast. "Hunting at night is rather unusual to begin with, but you also possess abnormal magic tools. There's more to you than meets the eye."

It should have been plain as day that I didn't have any magic tools on me. All I had on were my pants, shirt, and gauntlets. *Can she not see me?* She might've been fishing for information, or maybe she was basing assumptions on whatever information the spirits may have been feeding her.

"I showed you my hand, so how about you show me yours?" she went on.

"Not happening. What you told me was cheap compared to the value of the information you want from me. Spirit Magic is common knowledge among elves, right? Everything about *me* is classified."

"Oh, what a shame." *Looks like she's not going to put up a fight.* "All I wanted was to bother you a little and perhaps have a bit of a chat. I'm not looking to pry information from you."

"Great. Can I go now? I wanna get back to my stress relief."

"Heh... You really are interesting. All right then. I look forward to meeting you once more."

At once, her voice vanished, leaving me with these unsettling words. I had absolutely no desire to meet her again, and I doubted that I would, even if I'd wanted to. Elves and humans were enemies. Elves couldn't get into Regin...not that they would even try. The elf that I'd spoken with had been an outlier. What kind of elf would want to talk to a human, or at least someone they perceived to be human? Weirdo.



It was almost dawn. The faint sunlight lit up the clouds, painting them purple and orange. The trees began to green, and the rays of sun

that pierced through the leaves gave their branches and trunks color.

A solitary shadow ran between the trees. Her black skirt billowed in the wind. Her dress armor didn't fit the thick forest around her; however, it looked good against the clouds in the brightening sky.

Once she had found her prey, she went straight towards it without slowing down in the slightest. Her prey was within a pack of lupine monsters. The pack immediately began to flee as soon as they saw her, but the difference in their speeds was too great. So they split up and darted for the trees to hide—except for her target, which weaved masterfully around them. This should've made it harder for Ariya to catch it, but with the Shadow Zekkinotachi, she cut down the trees in front of her before continuing to pursue it without altering her course.

It took Ariya just a few minutes to close the gap and slash the wolf in half.

“Perhaps that was slightly unnecessary,” she mumbled to herself.

Zekkinotachi could cut through anything, but using it consumed a lot of mana. At the very least, at her current level of mana manipulation, a single swing burned through a decent amount of mana. She'd been very sloppy in her pursuit of the wolf and had spent a lot more mana than she'd needed to.

She carried the two halves of the wolf's corpse to a clearing not too far away. “I might have gone a little too far trying to vent my feelings.” She smiled wryly as she looked at the corpse.

Reflecting on her actions didn't clear up the turbulent feelings inside her. As she began a simple dissection of the wolf to obtain proof of its death for her job, she couldn't help but dwell on her internal turmoil. She had no clue when or why it had started, but she couldn't seem to rid herself of these murky feelings.

After the coup, she'd left the castle with Inori after he'd made her a vampire. Ever since then, she'd done nothing but train and keep moving. She hadn't had a single moment to rest. But since they'd arrived at Regin, she'd basically been separated from Inori, and maybe that space was what had finally allowed her to realize the situation she was in.

Or maybe she'd realized it when Inori had used her to test out his Skills. Or maybe when he'd been dragged off by the Holy Knight named Fanatique. Maybe the realization had been bundled up with how she'd felt when Fanatique had said those words to her. Maybe it was because of the weird way that Inori looked at her. Maybe it was in how much his actions and the things he said annoyed her. And why didn't Inori say anything? Could he not tell that she was avoiding him?

She had no idea how she felt about him. Every time she tried to think about it, it was as though something inside her would break.

Alarm bells would go off inside her mind, telling her to stay away. And in the first place, she didn't *want* to feel. Why did she have to feel...whatever this was, at all? The only thing she was sure of was that the feeling was persistent, and spanned across her entire body.

She let out a sigh. She'd hoped that she would feel better, but she didn't. In contrast, despite the rising sun dispelling the forest shadows, she felt like a greater shadow was cast over her heart. In the face of the light, she squinted.

"Oh." There was a patch of dawn flowers in the clearing. At dawn, the translucent, pale-yellow petals had quietly opened. By the time the sun had fully risen, the clearing was filled with flowers, giving the area a sort of mystical feel.

"I hadn't expected there to be flowers here, but this is perfect." Ariya smiled slightly, and then began to pick some flowers.



"I'm so happy! I never thought I'd see the day that *you* suggest we go to church!" Sister Sensei said to me, practically beaming.

Just as she'd said, I'd asked her if we could go to the church today. But my purpose in doing so wasn't to get out of the hell that was her training. Instead, I wanted to take a look at my enemy. If the church really did have a secret connection to the heavens, maybe it wasn't the best idea to just waltz in there. Then again, if the only reason I had for not going was because I didn't want to, then I might as well have gone.

It might have been ill-advised, but nothing ventured, nothing gained. A little danger was to be expected, but this was well worth it. However, I wasn't so bold that I'd go two days in a row, so I'd suggested going a few days after my first visit.

"Are you gonna start coming here by yourself?" Sister Sensei asked excitedly.

"Nope." *Like hell am I going to make this a daily ritual.*

"Aw, that sucks." Sister Sensei hung her head a little in disappointment.

As we walked along the same path that she'd taken me on before, I couldn't help but notice that there were more people than usual.

"Whoa." I'd almost bumped into someone. I hated this. If it were nighttime, then at least I could have slipped through the crowd or sent people flying if they bumped into me.

"Must be a lot of people because of the holiday." Sister Sensei weaved through the crowd easily. She must have been using her magic tools to increase her physical abilities. "Here," she said, holding her left hand out to me. "We don't want to get separated. Grab on."

"Hm? Okay." I nodded and did so. *Wait, why do we need to hold*

hands? *I know where we're going. It doesn't matter if we get separated.* It was too late for me to let go now, though. Plus, her hand was incredibly soft. *Not bad.*

In the interest of not rocking the boat, I decided to play along. Just as I did, I noticed a certain person in the crowd. It was Ariya. *Oh, right—didn't she and Sister Sensei have a little bit of an argument a few days ago?* I hadn't had a chance to talk to her about it yet.

By the time I'd get back, Ariya would already be gone. Apparently she'd taken an ongoing job that had her looking for flowers for medicinal use, which only bloomed in the early morning. Had she just got back? There were some things I wanted to talk to her about, but I hadn't had the opportunity to do so yet. I couldn't bring up everything I wanted to discuss with Sister Sensei right here, but it was still a good opportunity.

I waved my free hand at Ariya, but as soon as I did, she disappeared. *Huh?*

"Kiri, what's the matter?"

"Uh... Nothing." *Well, if she's hiding from me, then I probably shouldn't force her to talk.*

After that, nothing really out of the ordinary happened. We arrived at the chapel, and just as expected, it was crowded. Still, it was quiet, and I was sure to remain mentally on guard in order to block any unwanted probing into my mind.

I felt something trying to connect to me, but even though that connection was definitely stronger than before, I was able to block it. They were definitely on their guard too. I began to appraise the large statue of the goddess in the chapel. Detect was a power from this world, and was unable to look into what the gods of this world were up to, but perhaps Appraisal—something I'd gotten from another world—could.

Goddess of Light (Holy Land of Ryne)

Quality: C / Value: 240000 Dells

A statue in the image of the goddess of light.

Commissioned by the Holy Land of Ryne.

There didn't seem to be anything strange about it. Or maybe there was, and Appraisal just couldn't tell. *I should keep looking.* I closed my eyes and pretended to pray, but instead used Omniscience and Appraisal together to scan all the items within the chapel—the statues, the art, and the pedestals.

Rock of Holy Light (Holy Land of Ryne)

Quality: SS / Value: ??? Dells

A rock made from a tree of the gods. The church is obligated to keep this upon a pedestal. It is a conduit for the powers of the goddess.

Its description, along with the fact that its value was unknown, screamed “suspicious” to me. Plus, no matter how many times I examined it with Detect, all it said was that it was an ordinary rock. Okay, this pretty much settled it. The goddess used that rock throughout her churches to probe into the minds of her followers...or something. At the very least, it was clear that they used churches as their base of operations.

As much as I wanted to investigate that rock further, there were too many people around. That was okay, though. Just learning about its existence was a win in my book.

“Are you finished? I’m seriously impressed by how fervently you pray,” Sister Sensei said in a low voice.

“I just really dig the silence,” I replied in an equally low voice as we exited the chapel.

“That’s fine. Whatever gets you through the door.”

So me looking into gods hacking people’s minds is okay, then? I wasn’t really a fan of beings that used silly tricks to probe into the minds of their followers.

We exited the double doors to the outside—and when we did, someone suddenly jumped out from behind one of the pillars.

“Whoa.” They almost bumped into me, so I took a step back. However, they just ignored me and kept running, their black robe fluttering slightly as they did.

“Hey, no running on church grounds!” Sister Sensei yelled after him. “This is the border between our world and the goddess’s world—it’s holy ground. It isn’t a place for cutting in front of others.”

The robed person stopped in his tracks and turned around. We could see part of their face from beneath their hood.

Chris Chamsel / Human

HP: 57/57 / MP: 295/306 / STR: 102

VIT: 98 / DEX: 87 / AGI: 58 / INT: 245

Divine Blessing(s): None

Titles: Summoner, Avenger

It was a haggard woman, with eyes that looked like she’d seen hell. She focused those dark, sunken eyes on Sister Sensei.

“You know nothing...” she hissed, leering at Sister Sensei.

“Um...everything okay?” Sister Sensei’s question was genuine, but

the woman simply ran off.

“What was that about?” I asked.

“Was she a thief or something?”

Hm... She didn't look like a thief. As far as I could tell with Appraisal, she'd been a normal human being. The only thing about her that was suspicious was her title of “Avenger.” At the very least, there didn't seem to be any kind of commotion within the church, so it was doubtful that she'd taken revenge on one of the clergy members and then ran away. Anyway—who was I, the police? Why did I have to care?

“Do churches usually attract thieves?”

“Nope. Security's tight at churches. There's always a Holy Knight on-site. There are a lot of Holy Knights around at this time of year too.”

“Oh? Why's that?”

“Well, in this town, there's a person named Raeven... Oh!” Sister Sensei stopped in her tracks.

Not too far away from us, there was a person who looked like a Holy Knight with a few nuns surrounding him.

“Who's that?”

“The guy I was just talking about. The captain of the fourth squad, Raeven. He's a household name among us Holy Knights.” I could hear a tinge of excitement in her voice, similar to when a fan meets a celebrity.

But he wasn't good-looking, and he was definitely on the older side. He *did* have a pretty majestic beard, though. Overall, he looked like a very stern and serious person.

“Why's he so famous?”

“He's the hero who saved this town from a monster stampede ten years ago. The stampede has happened every three years since, and he helps to command all of the Holy Knights.”

From what I'd heard from Sister Sensei, Regin was apparently a place for female Holy Knights to train. It seemed other Holy Knights came to Regin to participate in the training camp under Raeven's command. A lot of women dropped out, and only a few became proper Holy Knights. Out of those, only a handful would be selected to serve directly under Raeven. I didn't understand why it had to be so complicated.

“Are there any male Holy Knights?”

“Yeah—more than there are women. But they undergo even harsher training elsewhere.”

Girls and guys train in different places? In different towns?

“So does that mean that you're one of the chosen few?”

“Nope. I just came here recently for this very training.”

It was apparently slated to start ten days from now, meaning that she didn't have a whole lot to do until then. *So she's only training me to kill time? What am I—her plaything?* At that moment, Raeven noticed Sister Sensei and beckoned her over.

"Oh, he's calling me. Sorry, I might be a while, so go back to the guild before me, 'kay?" Having said this, she hurried over to him.

Apparently, they already knew each other. *Maybe I should check him out before I go.* There was a chance that he was the one who'd been trying to probe into my mind. Then I figured I might as well check out Sister Sensei too, while I was at it.

Fanatique Rasshoth / Human

HP: 72/72 / MP: 563/563 / STR: 102

VIT: 79 / DEX: 467 / AGI: 93 / INT: 326

Divine Blessing(s): Oracle (lesser)

Titles: Holy Knight of the Holy Land of Ryne, Devout

Her stats were a lot lower than Ariya's. She probably relied greatly on her magic tools, but since that wasn't reflected in her stats, I had no idea how strong she actually was.

"Oracle" was a blessing that a lot of priests and clerics had. The fact that it was called "lesser" most likely meant she had a weaker version of it. Hopefully the gods wouldn't make use of it to come at me through her. But then again, I didn't really get the sense she'd been probing me, so I probably didn't have to worry.

Raeven Vejin / Human

HP: 173/173 / MP: 926/926 / STR: 296

VIT: 241 / DEX: 650 / AGI: 103 / INT: 755

Divine Blessing: Oracle (intermediate)

Titles: Captain of the Holy Land of Ryne's Fourth Squad, Hero of Regin, Virgin Hunter

Whoa! The hell is up with that title?! Sure, his stats made him strong for a human, and that was surprising, but it wasn't nearly as surprising as his last title. *Seriously, what the hell?!* It would still have been a problem even if his title had encapsulated women who weren't virgins...but he was a captain of Holy Knights, all of whom were supposed to be virgins! *Isn't that kinda...y'know...bad?!* Then again, judging from the smell of the Holy Knights around him, none of them were virgins anyway.

Clairvoyance. There's one in the oven! Hey, she's pregnant! At this point, I was starting to lose more and more faith in the church. I already found them fishy, but this was just something else. This hero

really got things done, didn't he? He looked so serious and uptight, though.

Would Sister Sensei also fall prey to this? Was he going to take her behind those closed doors, take off her armor, and "dig in"? *Wait, where'd she go?* I immediately thought of using Omniscience to look around, but then I decided against it. I wasn't the kind of person to pry into other people's lives. All I could do was pray for her. *Good luck, Sister Sensei!*

"Oh, hey, it's the old guy." After shedding some tears for Sister Sensei (just kidding), I went back to the guild as she'd instructed. I'd probably be waiting a while for her to get back, so I could rest assured that I wouldn't have to train anymore today.

"Hm? You slacking off today too?"

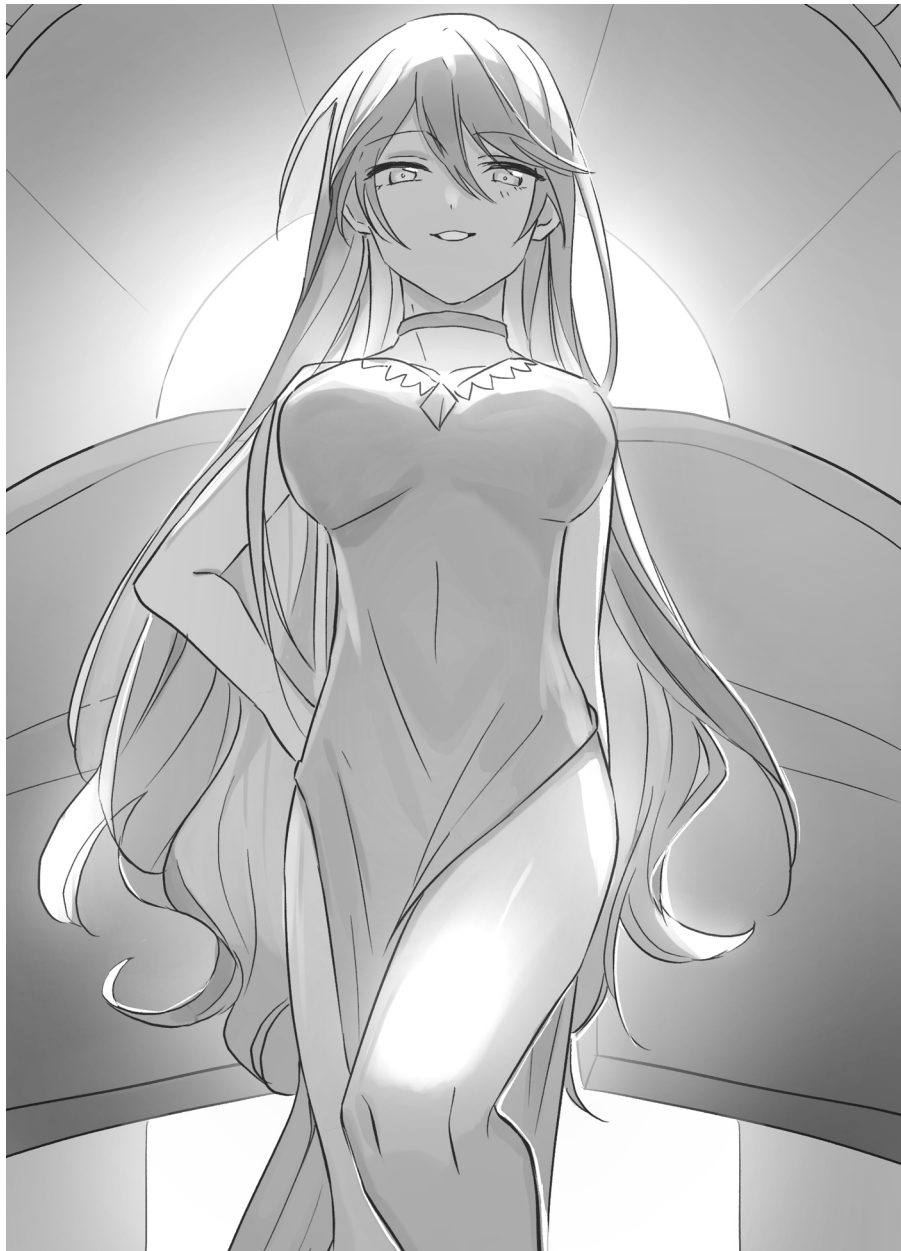
"That's mean. No, my teacher had some pressing matters to attend to."

I decided to keep the details of those "pressing matters" to myself and instead sat next to the old guy as usual. Normally we didn't really talk about anything in particular. We just sat quietly and drank together. There, I sipped on the drink I ordered. It was disgusting, but honestly, the more I got used to it, the more I started to appreciate it.

The old guy had ordered a strong drink too, but probably not as strong as mine. I wasn't even sure if you could call what I was drinking alcohol anymore. It was a lot closer to being a poison, which was perfect because it helped me level up my Poison Resistance faster.

The rest of the guild hall was loud with chatter, but the space around me and the old man was dead silent. It felt as if we were isolated from the rest of the world. I liked it. At first, I'd felt somewhat uncomfortable, but now I found it pleasant.

Bells rang as the doors to the guild opened, and in came a woman with long silver hair. The guild hall fell quiet, not just because no one recognized her, but because of her beauty. The way her silver hair caught the rays of the sun; her deep, beautiful yellow eyes; her porcelain skin—everything about her screamed "hot woman." Plus, behind her thin dress, she had a big rack. She had a mature woman's charm, only enhanced by her slitted skirt, which showed off her long, charming legs. In short, she was hot.



But I guess the fact that she wasn't a familiar face was more important to the adventurers here, even if their gazes had been stolen away by her beauty. Some of them even backed away from her a little. She didn't seem to care, though. She surveyed the room, then began to stare at me. *Uh, what do you want? I'm feeling embarrassed.* I looked away from her and focused on my drink. Regardless, she walked towards me, and then said the craziest thing I'd heard all day.

"Darling!"

I must've misheard her. When did I ever become anyone's "darling"? All the same, she ran up to me and embraced me, burying my head in her bountiful chest. The soft texture of it was great, but right now I was a lot more confused than I was aroused. I was starting to suffocate, so I pushed her off.

"Get off of me! Who the hell are you?"

"Aw, don't be like that. Not after that hot night we just shared."

"Hot night"? What? She must have me confused with someone else... Wait. I used Appraisal. *There's no way...right?*

Furuth / Demi-Human (Elf — Spirit Possessed)

HP: 65/65 / MP: 7012/7048 / STR: 57

VIT: 42 / DEX: 2364 / AGI: 56 / INT: 2846

Divine Blessing(s): Spirit Harmony

Titles: Spirit Priestess

Oh, god... She really is the elf from yesterday. But where were her pointy ears? Was she using a magic tool or something to hide them?

"Why are you here?"

"To see you! I told you I was looking forward to meeting you again, didn't I?"

She did say that. I just hadn't expected *today* to be the day. Did she come here to die? Elves entering human settlements was basically suicide. Or maybe I should be the one to kill her, since she had information about me that she shouldn't have. She had high INT, so it'd be both convenient and delicious.

The people around me were starting to get the gist of what was going on and had begun to stir. As for me, I'd been drawing too much attention as of late. I'd admit that the entire incident with Sister Sensei had been my own fault, but everything else, not so much. Before things got too out of hand, she moved a short distance away from me.

"I only came to say hi real quick. I know you're not very fond of standing out." *Then don't do stuff that makes me stand out in the first place.* I wasn't too against standing out if it made people hate me, but

I wasn't really a fan of this kind of situation. "Don't worry—I only have eyes for you. I'll do my best to keep my head down."

Just what did she think I was worrying about? She made it sound like I was one of those annoying, overly possessive guys. Or maybe she was saying that she wouldn't get involved with any other humans? If that was the case, then if she went missing because I'd killed her, the first person they'd point a finger at would be me.

"I made sure to let my countrymen know where I am, so don't worry. I send them letters periodically too."

So she's told them about me? If she was periodically writing them letters, it'd be suspicious if she suddenly stopped. Once again, I'd be the prime suspect. Even if I killed her and showed everyone here she was an elf, that wouldn't save me from the wrath of her elven brethren.

Either way, I'd be in trouble. If I was going to commit murder, I didn't want them to come to suspect me that easily. It'd cause a lot of different problems. Apparently, she'd come here having prepared a lot of different strategies to avoid me killing her. She was a crafty one.

"Then get going already."

"Sure. Can't wait to see you again."

I could tell that she was serious about that. And I had a bad feeling that the next time I saw her, it'd be in my room. I watched as the elf, not paying attention to any of the gazes on her, left the guild.

"Who was that?" the old guy asked me.

For the record, the elf had avoided the old guy entirely. Even an elf meeting him for the first time didn't like him.

"Don't pry."

"Your ex?"

"Somethin' like that." *Not at all like that.* Also, it seemed the word "ex" existed in this world too.

I started thinking back to recent events and how crazy things had gotten. I'd gone to the church yesterday and a god or something or other had tried to probe into me, I'd met a hero who loved virgins, I'd met a Spirit Magic user who was also an elf... Things had been so wild. I might've let my guard down too much. If I'd just Appraised everyone when we first met, then maybe I wouldn't be constantly surprised by them. Then again, I got a feeling that I'd still be surprised regardless. Then again...would it really have hurt to learn a few more details about the people around me?

That was what I'd done when I first came here, but I'd kinda stopped because I'd gotten sick of reading everything. Since then, I'd gotten into the habit of only using Appraisal when I felt it was necessary. Maybe it'd be best if I got used to doing all this reading, though. There was a lot of stuff that I didn't know about all these

people.

Having had this thought, I glanced at the old guy in front of me. I'd yet to use Appraisal on him. I was sure he'd be strong in a fight. This made it all the stranger that nobody thought to take him with them on their jobs. They all seemed to avoid him. *Yeah—I'm gonna use Appraisal on him.*

But first, I needed to prepare myself. I needed to make sure I didn't react in any way that'd bring shame to my name as someone who avoided jinxing himself. Judging by how things had gone recently, he might have been a pedophile, or a blade master who'd supposedly died, or a dwarf, or a cursed hero, or the lord of Regin, or the guild master, or the king of some country or other...

I decided to expect his identity to be something unexpected. That way, I wouldn't be surprised when I learned who he was. No matter what. I would have absolutely *no* comment on his identity. I'd keep all my reactions inside me. *Okay, I'm ready. Let's do this. Appraisal!*

Ighnoa / Demon (? — Chimera Homunculus — Demon
16.66% / Dragonewt 16.66% / Beastkin 16.66% / Elf
16.66% / Dwarf 16.66% / Human 16.66%)
HP: 1200000/1200000 / MP: 7200000/7200000 / STR:
50000
VIT: 50000 / DEX: 50000 / AGI: 50000 / INT: 50000
Divine Blessing(s): Demon King Tier, Sixth Pillar of
Divine Punishment
Titles: Current Demon King, Previous Previous Demon
King, Most Malevolent Demon King, Incarnation of
Despair, Tyrant, Calamity Level Threat, Destroyer,
Slaughterer, Annihilator, The Absolute, Demon King
Personality, Extremely Savage, Salaryman,
Reincarnated, Punished by God, Universally Hated

Okay, there might be one too many things to comment on here. So, pal...you're the demon king? Uh...seriously? Who the hell just shoved this nuclear warhead in my way? Also, what the hell was up with his stats?! What the hell's up with his races?! Oh god, I couldn't stop thinking about all this. Could somebody tell me that my Appraisal had just bugged out? Please?!

I prayed that my surprise didn't show on my face. I wasn't sure if Poker Face was helping to keep my face straight. Just as I was drowning in my thoughts about the old guy—the revived demon king sitting right in front of me—the guild doors opened.

"Sorry for the wait, Kiri." Sister Sensei had returned. *You're back a lot sooner than I expected.* She still smelled like a virgin. *I'm so happy he*

didn't get to you! This wasn't the time for stupid thoughts, though. I needed to get my head straight and realize how fortunate it was that she'd walked in right now.

"What'd you two talk about?" I asked.

"He asked me about the guy I'd brought to the church—you, of course. He told me that Holy Knights are supposed to be virgins and to avoid any illicit relationships."

Says the hero who gobbles up virgins like they're snacks!

"So what'd you tell him about me?"

"I told him that we're just teacher and student... Oh, and that you're weaker than me, so it'd be physically impossible for you to assault me."

Dammit! If he'd told her to stop, that might've freed me from this annoying training. *Also, I'm a lot stronger at night, okay?! I could have you for breakfast with my level 5 Sexual Prowess, okay?!* But then something occurred to me.

"Wait, what about that guy you brought here on your first day?"

"Oh, him? I was just using him to ward off other guys. I asked a priest for help. But it looks like I ended up getting involved with a guy, anyway..." *Oh, you're talking about me?* At the time, I hadn't been thinking about whether she was with a guy or not. All I'd wanted was to act out the cliché.

"Well, that's that...so let's get back to training!" *You mean "hell," right?* Sister Sensei yanked me out of my seat and began pulling me away.

"See you around, old man."

"What about your drink?"

Oh, right. I hadn't noticed until he'd pointed it out, but I still had a half-full tankard left. "You can have the rest."

"I'll pass. You're the only one who drinks crap like that. I don't wanna kill my liver."

I had a feeling that he could have put lava into his body and still been okay, but either way, I was calm again. I swiped my tankard and chugged the rest of it. *Ugh... Drinking poison is rough.* I wasn't sure if it was thanks to my regenerative abilities as a vampire or my Poison Resistance, but I wasn't immediately affected by it.

"Come on, Kiri!"

"Okay, okay."

I was rushed out of the Adventurers' Guild by Sister Sensei.

A sharp kick was thrown at me. I did my best to avoid it, but it still grazed my arm. Even just being grazed hurt a lot because of the immense power behind it. I could feel my arm going numb as well.

"See—I hit you again. You can't look and *then* dodge; you gotta

anticipate the attack. You've got good eyes, so put them to use."

I was out of breath and being lectured by Sister Sensei, here at our training ground. She'd never touched on the basics or anything—she just went full throttle into practical training.

"Even if I can predict an attack, who's to say that they won't change tactics?" I asked.

"You gotta anticipate that too."

You're asking for the impossible... Was this training useful for me? Well, it had its uses. I had a tendency to use Absolute Tracking to dodge attacks. Dodging attacks that had a set trajectory like Fenrir's projectiles was one thing, but it was impossible to predict the movements of masters like Aegiana. There might have been a skill out there that'd help me do so, but for now, it probably wasn't a great idea to keep relying on my eyes when there were people with higher AGI out there than me.

Overall, this training wasn't incredibly useful for me since I couldn't level skills during the daytime. It would've been better if I'd trained at night on my own. It wasn't *my* fault that I couldn't find the motivation to do so, though...

"Well, don't just stand there. Let's keep goin'!" Sister Sensei said, grabbing my arm and forcibly pulling me to my feet.

Her muscleheadedness reminded me somewhat of Aegiana.

"Oh, right," she said, apparently remembering something. "Sorry, I have Guidance tomorrow for the training camp, so I can't train you."

Oh, so no training tomorrow. Hell yeah! Finally, a break! What should I do? Heh, like I don't already know. I was gonna catch up on sleep. I wouldn't even go into the guild—I'd just stay in and sleep the entire day.

"But you shouldn't sleep all day, okay?" she added on. *What?!* "You should try getting some real-life fighting experience." *I think I've already gotten a lot from our regular training.* "So I want you to have a proper weapon. Do you have one?"

I do. A whole Shadow Storage full of knives and swords. I wasn't about to show her, though. That'd be stupid. They were all made of shadow metal, which had been created by my dark magic. They shouldn't have existed in this world, so I couldn't have her inspect them.

"I don't have any."

"I already kinda guessed as much, but still... It's amazing that you consider yourself an adventurer without any weapons."

Well, all I do is drink and sleep all day. Wouldn't it be weirder if I did have a weapon on me?

"How about you take some time to look for a weapon that suits you—but don't buy it, okay? Wait until I get back in two days so I can

sign off on it.”

Fine. I was already making plans to choose something at random and then immediately go back to sleep.

“Don’t choose one at random, okay? Really think about it. If you don’t, I’m gonna make training even harder.”

Understood. Could she read minds? “...Okay.”

“That took you a second. Was I right on the money?”

“Let’s get back to training,” I said, trying to change the subject before she could make the training even harder.

She looked at me and let out a heavy sigh.

The sun had begun to set before I was finally freed from training. There was only a little time left before it was fully nighttime, so I decided to sleep for the time being. I opened the door to my room and collapsed onto my hard bed. I peeked into the room next to mine with Clairvoyance, but Ariya still hadn’t returned. That was fine. I wanted time to organize my thoughts about the events of the day, anyway.

Let’s put on our thinking caps. First on my list was obviously Ighnoa. He was the previous previous demon king, who had also been considered the strongest. According to the stories, he hadn’t been able to kill the heroes who kept getting summoned, so after hundreds of years of plundering and invasion, he’d finally died of old age, and peace had descended upon the world.

Magic tools had existed back then, but they’d only begun to be really produced *after* his death, bringing about the kinds of magic tools that existed today. Ighnoa had left a deep mark on history. Apparently, when the previous demon king had risen to power, humans had remembered Ighnoa and fell into despair. They’d wanted to surrender immediately without even summoning heroes. The only country that had summoned heroes was the Maccad Empire. The previous heroes had taken out the demon king by themselves, and had then been revered for it. To this day, Ighnoa was still spoken of as a symbol of death and despair.

Now, though, he was apparently a hood-wearing, alcohol-drinking, guild-hated adventurer. But *what* was he? Was he friend or foe? I couldn’t tell. If he was just as bloodthirsty as he’d been in the stories, then there was no point in him being here. There was no need for him to hide. He could easily crush country after country. All the same, it was hard to think of him as completely harmless, or as an ally.

If he wanted to live in peace, there had to have been better ways. He didn’t have to tolerate an adventurers’ guild that hated him. And there was a part of his stats that had bothered me. I recalled his stats with Photographic Memory.

Yep, there it is. “Reincarnated” and “Salaryman.” Was it possible that he’d been reincarnated from his life as a salaryman in Japan? The term “salaryman” wasn’t an English word; rather, it was a Japanese one. Maybe titles didn’t really have anything to do with language, though. After all, people in this world used words like “ex,” so it was possible that the etymology wasn’t significant. Either way, it was a great possibility that he was formerly Japanese.

It was hard to imagine a former Japanese person becoming a ruthless slaughterer. How could he keep his Japanese values and become a tyrant? Getting pleasure out of slaughter was already hard to imagine...but going as far as to become a tyrant on top of that? *Hm? What about me? Well, I can see myself doing it. So there might be other Japanese people like me.* Then again, there was no guarantee that he was also Japanese.

The next thing I wanted to think about was that elf...Furuth, or whatever her name was. She’d approached me once, so I could probably expect her to approach me again—hopefully at night. If she did, then at least I could hypnotize her. If I could manage that, then everything else would be taken care of. I had to wait for her to make contact with me again, though. I’d decide what to do after that.

Then, there was the Hero of Lust (my nickname for him). I decided to skip thinking about him, though, even if Sister Sensei was in danger. After all, her problems weren’t my problems.

The bigger thing weighing on my mind was what to do against the gods. I could slip into the church at night and examine the rock again. Maybe I could even use Conqueror on it. Appraisal had worked on it, so maybe Skills from other worlds would work on it too? The probability was high, and all I had to do was get the eyes of the church off the chapel. But could I get around the eyes of the heavens? Probably not.

Now that I had my thoughts in order, I could finally sleep. I felt my consciousness drifting away.

I could tell that night had fallen by the way that my body immediately perked up. Even though it had been pining for sleep mere minutes before, it now rejected any further thought of it. I was beyond pissed.

I was in the process of begrudgingly opening my eyes and getting up, but stopped when I sensed an unusual presence in my room. Had I left the door unlocked? That was entirely possible, considering how out of it I was and how much I’d been struggling to fall asleep. It was conceivable that, because of that kerfuffle, it’d slipped my mind to lock the door. How could I have messed up this badly?

As soon as I started freaking out about a potential intruder, however, I recognized the presence in my room. It was Ariya. *Jeez,*

way to scare me! I used Clairvoyance to look at her while keeping my eyes closed. It felt kinda weird having eyelids when one of my abilities basically circumvented part of their reason for existing...but whatever, that's not worth talking about right now.

Ariya, for her part, was simply standing in place, looking at me. Neither making an effort to move closer nor away, she continued to stand at an awkward distance and watch me sleep. She seemed to be thinking about something. *Uh, seriously, what is this about?*

No matter how long I waited, though, she didn't move a muscle. It was like she was frozen in place. *Maybe it's time for me to wake up.*

"What's up, Ariya?" I asked, opening my eyes. She jumped a little, and I could tell from the look on her face that she was both surprised and flustered. "Seriously, what's going on?"

"Nothing."

It's obviously not nothing. She'd been staring intently at me while I was "asleep," but now that I was awake, she couldn't look me in the eye. The change in her behavior hadn't happened overnight either. We hadn't been around each other as much over the past few days, and somehow things had gotten kind of weird with her. More specifically, she'd been acting strangely towards me. I had a feeling I knew what she was being weird about, but if I was wrong...it'd be so embarrassing.

"So...are you still hung up on what Sister Sensei—I mean, Fanatique said? You shouldn't be. Just forget it."

"What she said...?" Confused, Ariya didn't seem to grasp what I was getting at.

"When she said that you liked me." It felt awkward being the one to say it.

Ariya froze for a second before blinking and turning as red as a tomato. "I told you, I—"

"I don't know how you've felt about me up till now, but you've been acting weird around me ever since she said that." It was the only explanation I could come up with. Ariya's face turned a deeper shade of red. "Romance and lust go hand in hand—they feed off of each other. Plus, we've been together every day for the past month. It's not weird for you to have started being conscious of me as a guy."

I wasn't trying to be full of myself or anything. This deduction was the result of a calm and collected review of the evidence before me. I wasn't able to understand other people's feelings, so it went without saying that I didn't understand romance either. In fact, I found it illogical. If even psychologists couldn't understand it, there was no way I could.

"Romantic feelings are close to a type of psychological suggestion. It's pretty normal to start to think you might like a person after

someone makes the suggestion, even if you don't actually like them and there's no logic behind it."

This was especially true for sheltered princesses like Ariya. As someone who hadn't had any sexual experience until now, it wasn't unexpected for her to not have experienced any proper romantic feelings yet. So if she was pushed to be conscious of someone, it wouldn't have been easy for her to get them out of her head.

"Anyway, I think that the reason things have been weird is because you've started being conscious of me as a guy. Am I right?" I phrased this as a question but didn't wait for her inevitable denial. "Anyway, don't be."

"Huh?"

"To be clear, I'm not saying that it's wrong for you to be conscious of me as a guy. Rather, I'm saying that who I am inside shouldn't mean anything to you."

What do the awkwardness and nervousness of romance lead to? Apart from sexual arousal, all you get is fear and uncertainty about the other party's feelings.

"Regardless of how you feel about me, you serve me. You work in my best interests. That means you need to ensure that any information you have is actually shared with me."

Ariya fell silent for a bit, and then exhaled. "I feel so stupid."

"Great." That'd been my main intention in having this talk. I bet she was feeling pretty embarrassed. This would probably be a sore spot in the future.

"I wonder how much longer I'll have to watch you act so cocky in your position as my master. You should watch your back."

Cool, that's *the Ariya I know*. "So let's start sharing information. I've figured out a few things over the last couple of days," I said.

"Oh, you mean to say you haven't just been playing around with girls?"

"Of course not. Training is hardly 'playing.'"

Ariya chuckled lightly. I could tell that she was slightly relieved at my answer. I went on, explaining most everything that I'd learned. I was a little concerned that Furuth, or whatever her name was, might've been eavesdropping on us with wind spirits, but there wasn't really anything I could do about that anyway. I needed to get rid of that elf. As for Ighnoa, I decided to keep his existence from Ariya for now, since she was sure to run into him in the guild. I couldn't have her tense up in front of him or act suspicious. He might've already caught on to the fact that I'd figured out who he was.

"Oh—I need to go pick out a weapon tomorrow."

"A weapon? Don't you have weapons already?"

"Yeah, but this is an order from Sister Sensei because she won't be

around to teach me tomorrow. Would you mind coming with me?"

"Huh? Me?"

"Yeah, you. I can use Appraisal to figure out the abilities of each weapon, but I don't have any idea what it's like to use any of them. You have more knowledge about this world's weapons than I do, so I'm hoping you can help out."

Was I being too cautious? No, being cautious was good in this situation. Things rarely worked out the way you'd think.

"Also, it'd be annoying if people started freaking out, thinking that I'm turning over a new leaf just because I'm buying a weapon. At least, with you there, it'd look more like I'm begging the great Black Rose to buy me a weapon."

Ariya stared at me in silence with a tired look on her face. Until Sister Sensei had come along, my relationship with the people around me had been perfect—they had all hated me. They had hated me more than something cancerous. I'd been so close to being completely shunned.

Fans of Black Rose were very clear about their hatred for me, but the adventurers here were shrewd. I hadn't been violent with her in public or coerced her, so whatever problems we had were strictly between us. Without any of that, they wouldn't stick their noses into our business.

"All right. I don't have any requests tomorrow anyway, so I'll accompany you," Ariya said.

"Great; it's a plan. Feel free to sleep now."

"Are you sure? Will you be going hunting again?"

"No, I'll probably stay here. There's something I want to try out. I'll leave leveling up Sexual Prowess for another day."

"I see..."

Ariya seemed slightly relieved and also a little disappointed. *Yeah, she's been tainted.* And I had nobody else to blame for that but myself.

"Good night, then," she said as she left my room.

Let's get started. I sat on the floor, crossed my legs, and relaxed myself. It was almost as if I was meditating...though I guess some types of meditation have you on your knees instead of sitting like this. But, well, whatever.

I closed my eyes and tried to focus, putting as much strength as I could into Detect. My goal was to try to detect spirits. If I could, I wanted to see them. Given that beings like that elf existed, it was imperative that I started being able to sense spirits.

I'd come up with a theory yesterday regarding how to make Detect have even more clarity. And right now, I was trying to put it to use. Information about the world filled my head. I could sense the

underside of my bed and even the tiniest bumps on the ceiling. I was able to sense things that I'd never noticed before.

But I still wasn't able to detect spirits. Because of this, I could tell that this was going to take a while. There was no need to rush, but was it possible to achieve my goal tonight? Without that, I wasn't sure how easily I could move around at night without having to fear being detected by people who could use spirit magic. In the end, I decided it'd be best to take a few days to sort this out. And so I tried concentrating even harder.

However, by the time morning came, I'd had no success whatsoever in detecting spirits. I did have a feeling I'd detected something stirring, but it could just as easily have been my imagination. As soon as the sun rose, I could feel my exhaustion returning. I was sure I could sleep now. *Yeah, let's do that.*

We weren't planning to look for weapons at the crack of dawn or anything, so I still had time to sleep. Surely, Ariya would be considerate enough to realize that I needed more sleep and not come and wake me up. I lay down on my bed and drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 3

“It’s as lively as ever here,” I said to Ariya as we strolled through the town. Our destination was an armorer, but I wasn’t sure which one. “Where do you think we should go, Ari?”

“Hm... A few places have been recommended to me, but I’ve never been to any of them.”

That made sense. Even I knew what shops were famous around here from the rumors I’d picked up at the bar, but I’d yet to visit any of them. As such, I had no idea which shops were worth the hype.

“Let’s just walk around, I guess.”

“Oh—I’ve been told that the shop over there is good.” She pointed to a place that had weapons drawn on its sign. I’d heard about it before too.

“Let’s check it out then.”

“Okay.”

The shop seemed to carry pretty standard-looking weapons, and a lot of them, at that. Some were leaning against the walls, others were hanging from them, and there were still more that were displayed on stands. They were all neatly organized by the type of weapon. Most likely, they kept different sizes of each weapon in the storehouse behind the shop or something.

The floor was strangely dirty, which was probably because of all the customers tracking in mud, dirt, and god knows what with their shoes. However, the corners of the store were clean, so obviously there was some level of cleaning being done.

Just looking around, there seemed to be a decent selection. Appraisal confirmed my thoughts. Each of the weapons had a quality level of at least B. Looks like we’d hit the jackpot already—a shop like this was perfect for our purposes.

“Welcome...”

Yelp review: 1 star. Terrible attitude. Staff has no idea how to greet customers.

As soon as the clerk saw me, a sour look washed over his face. Apparently my bad reputation had spread farther than I’d expected. I hadn’t done anything to piss him off...well, probably...so there was no need for him to show me any animosity. Well—I guess even if it wasn’t sincere, he *did* end up greeting me. Honestly, though, I didn’t care that much—I’d known that it was coming.

I wanted to get started trying to choose a weapon that suited me...but I didn't know what suited me. Pretty much every last one of the weapons here was a magic tool. In this world, "weapons" was basically just another word for "magic tool." Those that weren't magic tools were just practice weapons. In the right hands, magic tools were powerful assets, but in mine, they might as well have been junk. And I doubted that Sister Sensei would allow me to choose anything that'd be trash when I used it.

Since she knew that I couldn't use magic tools, she probably intended for me to choose a weapon that I could actually use. *She's really asking for the impossible.*

"Oh—what about this?" I asked, eyeing a scythe that was resting against the wall. It was about as tall as me and had a huge, black-luster blade. I would've loved something like this back in my edgelord phase. Plus, it didn't seem to be a magic tool.

"Are you serious? Don't pick based on what'll satisfy your stupid fantasies." Ariya immediately shut me down, forcing me to reconsider my selection.

"I only chose it because it wasn't a magic tool, but okay..."

"A training weapon would be infinitely easier to use, and more effective."

I'm with you there...but why not the scythe? It wasn't like I'd be using it as my main weapon. It would just be for show.

"Pick wisely. You don't want your training load to increase, do you?"

She had a point. There was no doubt that I'd earn myself more training if I went down the scythe route. Would anyone ever buy this scythe, anyway? I was starting to think that it was only for display.

"Well, you should pick something out too," I told her. "You can't keep relying on a certain sword, can you?"

"You're right... I'll look around."

The "certain sword" I'd mentioned was, of course, Shadow Zekkinotachi. I generally had her avoid using it or showing it to other people. Not only had I created it by infusing it with dark magic, but it was also an Artifact. It'd cause a commotion if people saw it.

At the very least, though, it probably wouldn't be too hard to find a weapon that she could actually use. It was me we needed to worry about. Aside from the scythe I'd seen and training weapons, pretty much everything was a magic tool.

"Now that I think about it—you don't use guns, do you?" Ariya asked, pointing to one.

Even though I was kind of in a medieval Europe-themed world, guns existed. They were much more primitive than the ones in our

world. Put simply, they were similar to muskets or arquebuses. The bullets were round and the barrels of the gun didn't have the helical grooves that'd help the bullet spin. Of course, the guns were also not automatic, so you had to constantly reload them. Their power and accuracy were also lower than that of a bow and arrow.

I was sure that if more technological development was invested into guns, they'd jump up the power rankings of weapons—but then again, why would they focus on guns when they already had the powerful offensive projectile capabilities of magic? Plus, with the way the bullets were designed, you could maybe kill some of the weaker monsters, but there was no way you were killing anything bigger than that.

As it turned out, guns had apparently been developed by the previous heroes. *Way to pave the path to more violence.* Then again, I guess they had enough wisdom to have realized that teaching them about cartridges would be dangerous. Or maybe they didn't know how to make them. Even if they'd known about cartridges, it would've been hard to replicate a detonator.

Ariya had probably asked me about guns because they weren't magic tools. Nobody had tried to make them into magic tools before, because what would have been the point? If you were going to go out of your way to turn a magic tool into a gun, you might as well have spent the time and energy on a support item to assist your spellcasting instead. That would be hundreds of times more effective than a gun.

"I think it'd go well with your magic, Kiri."

By "magic," she was probably referring to Puppet Master. If I used Conqueror on the bullets, I would solve the biggest flaw of the guns in this world, because I could guarantee that my shots would never miss.

"I guess you're not wrong, technically."

"Just technically?"

"Well, either way, I'll get one."

I wasn't going to show this to Sister Sensei, though. Instead, I was going to try practicing with it at night and see just how useful it could actually be.

I surveyed the rest of the store to see if there was anything else here that I could use. If not, we'd go to the next place. Then again, I got the feeling that no matter where we went, it'd all be the same. These stores were more like magic tool shops than anything else.

However, Ariya was still looking around. She had a lot more to choose from, since she could easily wield magic tools. Even if she chose a weapon she wasn't used to, her Genius Divine Blessing would allow her to pick it up quickly. I didn't mind her taking a little bit to decide, but I wasn't really in the mood to be the guy who waits for years while the girl dillydallies about what to get.

I decided to use Omniscience to look around the storage space behind the store, but I didn't really see anything I wanted. I focused back on Ariya, who was now looking at a beautiful silver dagger. The hilt had very flashy decorations on it, making it look less practical as a weapon and more ornamental. *Let's take a look with Appraisal.*

Mithril Dagger / (Creator: Ardein Warf)

Quality: B / Value: 150000 Dells

A dagger with a high percentage of mithril in it. Primarily used for rituals and decorative purposes. However, it has high magic conductivity, making it great for mages.

Interesting. It wasn't only high in quality, but it even had a practical use. I thought it might've been too flashy for Ariya's tastes, but maybe not. Perhaps the apple didn't fall too far from the tree. Just like her mother and sister, Ariya may have also had a great love for all things shiny and flashy. That would explain why she was still wearing the flashy dress armor I'd made for her.

"You want it, Ari?"

"Huh? N-No." Snapping out of her thoughts, Ariya jumped a little at my question. She shook her head and put the dagger down.

"I don't mind buying it for you." Having a dagger with a high amount of mithril in it wasn't bad. Because of the impossibility of making pure mithril items, it was difficult for me to use Armament Craft to make anything like it. With that in mind, I decided to buy both the dagger and gun. Ariya looked like she wanted to say something at this point, but I chose to ignore her.

"Thanks..." said the unenthusiastic clerk after I'd made my purchase.

The price of the items, especially the mithril dagger, was a little inflated, but I had more than enough money to pay for them. For the record, I was in charge of our finances. Half of the requests that Ariya accepted were completed by me, and half of the monster parts she sold were from my night hunts too. To be clear, though, I was *not* her pimp. She merely served me, so of course I was the one who took care of the money. I wasn't a miser, but I wasn't one to be wasteful either.

"Um..." Just as we were about to leave, the clerk called out to us. It was almost a whisper, so I could've just pretended not to hear it, but I decided to humor him.

"What?"

"Are you and Black Rose really in *that* kind of relationship?"

This wasn't the kind of question a clerk should ask his customer, but I decided to let that slide. I also wasn't sure exactly what kind of

relationship he meant. Luckily, I had Ariya to give me the answer to my question.

“A man giving a woman a mithril dagger is used in novels as a symbol for proposal. It means, ‘if you don’t feel the same way, then stab me.’”

So, by “propose,” she meant like how we’d propose with a ring in our world? Huh. Stabbing, though...? *Isn’t that kinda excessive?* I hadn’t read about this in any of the books I’d memorized with Photographic Memory, but then again, I hadn’t really read any novels. Maybe I should have, since they would’ve given me a better understanding of this world’s culture. Well, that aside, how was I supposed to deal with this situation?

“Sorry, I’m kind of a country bumpkin. I only bought this dagger with the intention of giving her a dagger.”

It probably wouldn’t have been that big of a deal to leave this as a misunderstanding, but it was probably better to clear things up. At the very least, if I claimed that I came from the boonies, then it wouldn’t have been strange for me not to have read a book or two, since most villages didn’t even have a single book. It went without saying that people like that weren’t familiar with popular culture.

“Oh, I see...”

Looks like I convinced him—but now I was being looked at like I was some hick. *You do know that you’re in a remote village, right? You’re not in any position to feel superior to me.*

“I know it’s a little flashy, but is this really the sort of thing that people propose with?” I asked the clerk.

“No. If anything, this one’s more of a ritualistic item.”

Hm... Either way, it had to have some kind of use even outside of being a ritualistic item, because of its high mithril percentage.

“Plus, it’s not very sturdy because of the silver it contains, so it’s not even good for stabbing someone,” the clerk added.

Hm? Say what? “It has silver in it?”

“Yes, that’s what gives it that beautiful silver color,” the clerk cheerfully replied.

The only mithril weapon I’d seen that had this strong of a silver color was Aegiana’s Pure Mithril Sword. But anyway, silver was a big no-no. Why would I buy a weapon that had my own weakness in it?

“Uh, so, listen, I’m just gonna return th—”

Ariya interrupted as I was trying to return it. “What a nice weapon you just bought!”

I got the feeling that by “nice” she meant that it’d be easy to kill me with. Or at least, that’s what I suspected, given how quickly she’d done a one-eighty on buying it. So, ultimately, I bought the mithril-and-silver dagger for Ariya. I guess my original intention had been to

give it to her anyway, so this was bound to happen. I was happy for her to perceive me as her enemy...but I wanted to be more of a last boss for her, not just a one-and-done, stab-through-the-heart kinda guy. There was probably no chance of that, though... Oh, crap. Hopefully I didn't just jinx myself.

I looked around the shop for a little longer, but I didn't end up finding any weapon that fit the bill. Everything useful was a magic tool.

"Maybe I'll just be honest and tell her that there wasn't anything useful..." I thought out loud.

"Congratulations on your training getting even worse."

Ariya was right. No way Sister Sensei'd let me off the hook that easily. Ugh. Why was she so intent on training me?!

"Next store," I said, pointing at another armorer not too far away. It looked pretty run-down. There were even some weeds growing outside, and it didn't seem like there was much foot traffic either.

"It's very dilapidated..."

"Let's take a look."

"With so few customers, I doubt it'll have anything for you... You're not going in because you're hoping it's a front for some kind of secret shop, are you?"

"It might be!" *Yeah, I said it.* In my peripheral vision, I could feel Ariya's cold gaze on me as we entered. It felt so comfortable to me now, though.

"Hm..." The inside of the store was just as run-down as the outside. It was pretty sad. There weren't many weapons on display—it was like looking in someone's closet. Surprisingly, though, Appraisal showed me that the quality of the things here wasn't too bad. They were actually pretty decent.

"Welcome," said an old man in butler clothes, coming to greet us. *Hm? Butler?*

Ariya and I stared at him in silence.

"What can I help you with?"

Ariya and I continued staring at him in silence.



I looked at Ariya, and she looked back at me. We were currently in a run-down shop, but standing in front of us was a silver-haired butler with a white tie and coattails. Saying he looked out of place would've been an extreme understatement. He *seriously* looked like he didn't belong here. We couldn't reconcile the difference between the guy standing in front of us and the environment we were in, so we just kept staring at him in silence.

Eventually, Ariya managed to break the silence. "We've...come to buy a weapon." *Well done!* "Are these all the weapons available for purchase?"

Given that there were barely any weapons here, it cast doubt on whether this place was actually an armorer. Had we accidentally entered the wrong shop? Was this a storage facility owned by nobles or something? Maybe the sign outside had just been misleading?

"Please rest assured, this is an armory," the butler replied. It was as if he'd read my mind. Actually, wait—*had* he read my mind? Was there more to this old man than what met the eye? Honestly, after yesterday, I wouldn't have been surprised. *Let's take a peek with Appraisal.*

Sebastian / Human

HP: 85/85 / MP: 455/460 / STR: 62

VIT: 68 / DEX: 408 / AGI: 67 / INT: 312

Divine Blessing(s): None

Titles: None

He's normal. It felt like forever since someone had had a normal stat sheet. I felt rather relieved.

"So..." Ariya prompted.

"This shop operates on a made-to-order system. We make unique weapons according to our customers' desires."

At this point, I came to realize that I hadn't participated in the discussion yet. I couldn't just let Ariya hold the entire conversation while I ran commentary inside of my head.

"Do you take orders for weapons that are not magic tools?" I asked.

"Not a problem. We will do everything in our power to meet our customers' needs."

The formality of his speech bothered me, given that he was standing in a store that looked like it might fall apart at any second, but I decided to try to focus on the positives here. I had an out. If I could order a weapon here, it'd probably end up being B quality, so Sister Sensei wouldn't be able to complain.

“Could I place an order, then?” I asked.

“Certainly.”

If I was going to do this, I had to make something to fit my taste. What that meant was something that would be the envy of all edgelords out there.

“How about a sword as long as a human? The blade should be sharp on one side, and both thick and wide. Put a guard on the hilt. I don’t need any special designs on it.”

“I see. A great sword, focused on hacking. Almost like a nata. Simple is best in this case, correct?”

Hm. This guy knows his stuff. “How much’ll this set me back?”

“What is your budget?”

“About this much,” I said, using all ten of my fingers to reply.

We’d been killing it at the guild, so we had a lot of disposable income.

“Understood. I will make the best possible sword within your budget.”

“Thanks.”

After placing the order, I did some test swings with some of the simple swords in the store so that he could observe me. Apparently, he wanted to take notes on my habits to optimize the type of sword he made for me. He made sure to take note of where my center of gravity fell too. I thought these would be the kinds of things he’d check after the sword was made, but apparently he wanted to do this both before *and* after.

After we finished going through the measurements he wanted to take, Ariya and I left. This might just have been a secret store. I had high hopes for it, even if I didn’t know how things would end up. Since I didn’t have to pay in advance, if I didn’t like the sword, I could just choose not to pay. Hopefully, that meant that I wouldn’t be swindled. I still had no clue why he’d been wearing a butler’s uniform, though. He wasn’t even a clerk—he’d been the blacksmith himself. At the very least, it had been a very unique experience.

“Did you want to buy anything?” I asked Ariya.

“No, I already have this,” she said, showing me the dagger I’d bought her.

Until now, she’d been holding it against her chest, which was definitely weird. Why hadn’t she put it in a bag or something? Okay, stupid question. It would’ve poked a hole through a bag. Still, it was kinda unnerving to have someone clutching a knife when they’d gone on record saying that they wanted to kill you.

At any rate, we’d accomplished our goal for the day sooner than I’d expected, so maybe it was time for lunch. It was just a little past noon now, after all.

“What would you like to do? Would you like to go back to our lodgings or have lunch while we’re out?” said Ariya.

“Let’s grab a bite. It’s been a while since I had a meal anywhere outside of the guild.”

I didn’t hate the wild flavors that the old lady at the place we were staying cooked up or the wild flavors from the guild, but since we were out and about, I figured I might as well have something different. Something without garlic, of course.

“Then would you like to try a restaurant I’ve been meaning to check out?”

“Lead the way,” I told her.

Ariya sometimes paired up with other parties, so she probably got her restaurant recommendations from them. Maybe it was because I was always at the guild bar, but I’d only ever gotten bar recommendations. I had no clue where the good places to eat around here were.

“We’re here.”

“Here? I like the atmosphere.”

The restaurant that we’d come to had seating outside on its terrace. It had beautiful white walls supported by deep-brown wooden columns. It had a very chill and trendy atmosphere. It kinda reminded me of the cafés back in Japan.

Despite appearances, its prices were fair. Most of the customers weren’t upper-class people. There was a mix of both old and young men and women. I wasn’t too surprised when the faces of the waiters soured at the sight of me, but they didn’t deny me entry, which was nice. Also not too surprisingly, the waiters suggested that we sit in the less crowded terrace. *I get it. You don’t want me around other people. I would’ve loved to not be in the sunlight, though.*

Ariya and I were halfway through our lunch when Sister Sensei walked by.

“Oh, Kiri!” she called out with enthusiasm.

What the hell are you doing here?! What happened to “Guidance,” or whatever it was? As soon as Ariya heard her voice, she jumped a little. Sister Sensei also pouted a little bit after spotting Ariya, but she still entered the restaurant without any hesitation and took an empty chair at our table.

“Guidance ended earlier than I expected, but I didn’t get a chance to eat lunch yet.”

“Uh-huh.”

Sister Sensei called a waiter over to order.

“Did you pick out a weapon, Kiri?” she asked.

“I couldn’t really find anything good, so I ordered one.”

“You *ordered* one?” From her reaction, it was apparent she didn’t know anything about the old man or his shop. “From where?”

I explained, but she still had no idea what store I was talking about.

“Well, it’s pretty run-down, so you might have just thought it was a shack or something.”

“Are you sure that place is okay?”

“You don’t need to pay in advance and returns are allowed. There’s no fear of being scammed.”

Right as I finished explaining, Sister Sensei’s food came out. *They’re seriously fast with the food.* It was like a Saizeriya restaurant in Japan. Sister Sensei said a quick prayer before digging in. *Is this the church’s version of Japanese people saying something before they eat?*

Then, Sister Sensei looked at Ariya for a little bit. “So why is she with you?”

“What does that matter to you?” Ariya replied angrily.

“I know I didn’t tell Kiri to go out and pick a weapon by himself, but I didn’t say to bring you. Besides, shouldn’t you be out taking care of a request or something?”

“Wouldn’t you believe it? I had the day off. And I don’t see any problem with me accompanying him.”

“Oh—I was just concerned that Kiri was being babied by you again. Oh, wait... Is this a date? If it is, I’m so sorry about intruding.”

“We’re not on a date!”

“Uh-huh. But you’re having lunch out on the terrace like this...”

“I told you, we’re not like that!”

Um, why is it that this conversation is about me, but I haven’t been able to get a single word in? I’d already finished eating, but there was still food on their plates. Sure, Sister Sensei had just gotten her food, but Ariya still had trouble kicking her habits from when she’d been a princess. She ate in a very refined way. It was very regal, but it was also very slow.

I looked away from the two of them and instead turned my gaze onto the people passing by. Time ticked by slowly. I found myself growing more comfortable and could feel my eyelids getting heavy. I might’ve had a headache from the direct sunlight, but my sleepiness was winning out.

“And... It...”

“But... To...”

“He...”

“... ”

“... ”



“I’ve been with him longer! I understand him far better!”

“Well, because I’m his teacher, we’ve been spending most of the day together, so I’ve gotten so much closer to him! Plus, they say love is blind!”

Indeed, what had happened to their conversation? They’d completely forgotten about Inori and had gone back and forth for so long that the trajectory of their discussion had veered very far from where it had originally begun.

“Ugh, you just don’t listen! How about we just ask him? How about that, huh?!” Ariya cried.

“Fine! Kiri?!”

At last, they looked at Inori, but he was fast asleep.

“Why are you asleep?!” Ariya screeched.

“Wake up, Kiri!”

“Huh?” Inori looked at them groggily. “What a familiar situation... It’s been a while...” Inori mumbled as he came awake.



After we were done with our food, we left the restaurant, but Ariya and Sister Sensei still bickered the entire way back. Although the conversation was about me, I couldn’t get a single word in. So, instead, I decided to make a run for it. Sure, they may have been fighting over me or something, but I couldn’t care less how they felt. Their conversation meant nothing to me. Thus, there was no need for me to be involved. Actually, I didn’t *want* to be involved, full stop.

“...So I ran away.”

“That’s just like you,” the demon king said, letting out an exasperated sigh.

And as usual, I ran away to the guild bar. There, I spotted my drinking buddy, the demon king Ighnoa, so I decided to sit with him. I was pretty sure I was acting normally—hopefully there were no signs that I was slightly on guard.

“Aren’t they gonna find you immediately?” he asked.

“Hm?”

“Even last time, that nun came straight here.”

He had a point. It was probably only a matter of time until they found me. At the very least, though, I didn’t want to be found by them until they’d calmed down.

“Hm...what should I do?”

“Why don’t you go on a job? They won’t find you if you leave town.”

“Good point, but I don’t have a weapon.”

He gave me a disappointed look and then chugged the rest of his drink. “Then how about you come out with me?”

“Wurh?” I hadn’t intended to make a weird sound—it just came out.

“As long as we don’t go anywhere too dangerous, I can keep you safe.” He didn’t look like he was joking. He was looking me straight in the eye.

“What are you playing at?”

“Well, I was thinking it’d be a good time for you and me to have a chat.”

My heart was pounding in my ears. *He wants to talk to me alone? Somewhere nobody can see us?* There was only one reason why he’d suggest this... He knew that I knew. What were my options here? I could refuse on the grounds of not wanting to expose myself to any chance of danger. Then again, there probably wasn’t anything more dangerous than the demon king sitting right in front of me.

I also had to consider why on earth he’d want to have a chat with me in the first place. If all he wanted to do was shut me up, he could’ve feigned ignorance about the fact that I’d discovered his identity and killed me whenever he wanted. His stats were ridiculous. He could probably sneeze on me and I’d insta-die, even at night. So what was the point of talking? I tried to think as quickly as possible, but that still left a noticeable gap between my responses.

“Don’t worry,” he said in a low voice. “I’m not lookin’ to kill you, Inori... No, I *can’t* kill you.”

Was he lying? Was there any reason for him to lie, though? No—not for a guy as strong as him. He held my life in the palm of his hand. There shouldn’t have been any need for him to go out of his way to cook up a scheme just to kill me.

I was also intrigued by what he meant. In other words, even if he wanted to, it wasn’t possible for him to kill me. But why? There were so many things I wanted to understand, so really, I could only answer him in one way.

“Okay.”

Ultimately, I’d decided that even if this was dangerous, the usefulness of the information I could gain outweighed the risk.

At a little past noon, the sun was almost right above our heads. Being in direct sunlight really sucked for me. The clouds rolled lazily through the refreshingly blue sky, urged on by a light breeze blowing through the meadow, caressing the leaves on the trees and my cheeks.

This far out, Regin almost looked like a grain of rice in the distance. Even though we’d come all the way out here, I couldn’t sense any monsters nearby. It was seriously a beautiful day, but I couldn’t enjoy any of it one bit because of the nervousness gripping my heart. Even if I tried to run from the demon king before me, I wouldn’t even

make it one step before he caught me. I had to stay on guard. My heart was beating so loudly. I'd never felt like this before. *Is... Is this love...?*

"Here should be good." The demon king stopped suddenly and turned to face me.

As soon as he did, Detect picked up something abnormal. Something was emanating from him. That was as specific as I could be about the phenomenon. It felt like the world was writhing. Detect didn't pick up on him using any magic, nor did it detect his mana being used. Even so, my gut told me that he'd erected a barrier.

"Phew," said the demon king, nonchalantly sitting down. I had no clue what was going on, so I remained standing. He chuckled at the sight. "Relax. Take a seat."

I looked at him for a little before cautiously doing just that.

"So what's this all about?"

"I'll get right to that," he said, pulling out a cigar and lighting it.

Something about the way he'd done that felt familiar. It kinda reminded me of a certain someone...my father, perhaps...the memories of whom were shoved deep into the corner of my brain. *God, this guy stank. Also, wait. This world has tobacco?*

The demon king noticed my curious gaze. "Hm? Oh—this? Demons sell tobacco. Also, as I'm sure you've figured out, I'm the demon king, Ighnoa."

Annnnd there we go. He confessed to being the demon king. He had no intention of hiding it anymore. I felt stupid about having been so on guard. If all of this wasn't about keeping his identity a secret, then I had absolutely no clue what he wanted from me. I might still have been in danger, though, so I needed to make sure that I stayed on my toes. I couldn't let him psych me out.

"Heh... You really *did* know, didn't you? I won't ask how you found out, but I'll answer a few questions I'm sure you're dying to ask."

Oh, it's Q and A time already? Great—but what about the spirits who can eavesdrop? Even if I couldn't detect anyone else in the vicinity, there was no guarantee that there weren't people listening in via spirits.

"You're not worried about anyone eavesdropping with spirits?"

"*That's* your first question? Well...there aren't many who can do that in the first place. Even the most powerful elves can't really pull it off. Anyway, anything they hear will be mixed in with static, so they won't be able to figure out what we're saying. No need to freak out over that."

Oh, I see... But what about that elf, Furuth? She'd been able to have a full conversation with me.

“What about having a conversation? Is that possible?” I asked.

“Hm... I guess using magic to extend the range of your voice would create a situation kind of like a radio.”

Radio? “I meant something more like a two-way communication device. Like a phone,” I explained.

“That’s completely different. It’d be next to impossible, even for an elf. Probably only the spirits themselves could do that.”

Thinking back, Furuth had had the title of “Spirit Possessed” in her status. Maybe that had something to do with how she’d been able to pull that off.

“But even if someone with a power like that exists, you don’t have to worry. I’ve brought all the spirits in the area under my command by force.”

Come again? I tried using Detect once again but was quickly reminded that I couldn’t sense spirits with it. However, I *could* tell that something was different. Did his status as demon king allow him to control spirits? I wouldn’t have been surprised, given how ridiculous his stats were.

“Okay, then let me start asking questions.”

“Didn’t you already ask one?”

Ignoring his nitpicking, I continued. “What did you mean when you said you ‘can’t kill me’?”

“You don’t wanna know why the demon king is here?”

Most people would’ve started with that...but the question I’d asked concerned my survival, so it took priority.

“Well... Okay, then,” he said. “I wanted to talk to you about that, anyway. Look.” He blew out some cigar smoke, and then pulled down his hood.

I gaped in surprise. He had animal ears, which wouldn’t have surprised me if he didn’t also have human ears. He had four ears in total. *That’s not right.* And they were long too, like an elf’s. He also had two horns, which looked like they’d come from a demon. His pupils were crescent-shaped like a lizard’s, and he had scales on his neck like dragonewts do. In light of all this, I figured his beard was probably dwarf-like. And looking at the whole picture, I only had one thought.

“You’re all over the place.”

“I know, right? My head especially is a mess.” His head was a combination of all the races; it’d naturally draw attention. “Officially, my race is ‘chimera homunculus.’”

I thought back to when I’d seen his stats. It had said he had six different races, each at sixteen point sixty-six percent. I was starting to catch on to what that meant.



“Your body was manufactured using bodies of various other races,” I said.

“Yeah, and then they stuck my soul in it. The last time I was the demon king, I was a normal demon, but not anymore. Now I’m a hodgepodge of races.”

Well, this was certainly confusing. But also, I had no idea how this had anything to do with the reason why he couldn’t kill me.

“So, here’s the problem. My Divine Blessing, Sixth Pillar of Divine Punishment, is more of a curse than a blessing.”

“It *does* sound like a divine punishment.”

“If I kill anything that’s the same race as me, I die too.”

Oh, okay. Wait... “Aren’t you both all the other races and none of them at the same time?”

“Yeah, but the rule still applies. If I kill a demon, dragonewt, beastkin, elf, dwarf, or human, I’ll die too.”

Yeah, there’s no way he could be the demon king like that. That’s a relief, though. If he was telling the truth, then he couldn’t kill me.

“So, you can’t kill me because I’m human?” I asked.

“Exactly.”

It didn’t seem like he knew I was a vampire, which meant that he didn’t know everything about me. Even so, I felt like he could see right through me. I couldn’t shake that uncomfortable feeling, which made talking to him hard.

“Well, I get why you’re here now. You can’t exactly give out orders to kill people when you’ll die too,” I said.

“Yeah, that’s part of it.”

“There are other reasons?”

“Yeah, *and* the main reason. But before I get into that, let’s talk a bit about the past.”

Well, this is sudden. Now he’s gonna tell me about his past?

“As you may know, I was the previous-previous demon king. Since birth, I have possessed abnormal powers. Everything always went the way I wanted it to. Booze, money, women—I took everything I wanted by force. All I had to do was flaunt my strength and then everyone fell in line. I got a bunch of beautiful wives and lived lavishly. Eventually, it became obvious that the powers I had would make me demon king.”

For demons, power was everything. One’s standing in demon society directly correlated with one’s strength. That’s probably why it had become obvious he would be the demon king of that generation.

“But no matter what I obtained, I never felt satisfied. I assumed the title of the demon king and began invading the lands of humans, but it didn’t satisfy me one bit. There wasn’t anyone who could

oppose me. Until the very end, all I wanted was happiness...but that never happened.”

This all feels very stereotypical demon king..

“After I died, I appeared in a completely white space and met god.”

Hm? A white space? God? Just like I did?

“That individual claimed to be the chief god.”

Oh, nope. Not just like I did.

“They said that I’d gone too far and left a big scar upon the world. Thus, I was to be punished.”

“Is that where your Divine Blessing comes from?”

“No. My punishment was being stripped of my power, abilities, memories—everything that made me me—and being reincarnated into the Abandoned World.”

Hm...that sounds familiar. “What’s the Abandoned World?”

“The world you came from. None of the gods keep watch over it.”

Oh, okay, so he does know that I’m Japanese. “So what do you think happened when I was reincarnated? I was born into a completely average family without any special gifts, abilities, or particularly good looks. I lived a completely unremarkable life, struggled through a regular person’s challenges, married a normal-looking girl, and had a kinda handsome kid. We had money troubles and I’d get into fights with my wife every now and then, but still, I lived my life as a normal salaryman.” He paused for a moment to chuckle. “I was happy. Isn’t that ironic? I had none of the things that I’d had when I was a demon king, but as a human I’d obtained the one thing that I’d wanted when I was a demon.”

Desire itself had no limits...but maybe not fulfilling those desires could still lead to happiness.

“Ultimately, happiness is really all down to how you think about it.”

“Yeah,” I agreed.

In my mind, being happy was a form of self-suggestion. Happiness didn’t have any single definition. It was subjective. If you thought you were happy, then you were happy.

“When I was summoned to this world again as the demon king, I was given the Sixth Pillar of Divine Punishment and immediately remembered my life as the previous previous demon king. Hilarious, isn’t it? Then I began to think about what I wanted to do this time around, and I decided to toss out my old goal of becoming happy. Now, I don’t want anything.” He looked up at the blue sky and blew out a wisp of smoke. A small bird fluttered past, quickly disappearing from sight. “I’d gained everything that this world had to offer. I...became happy. It’s stupid to set ‘happiness’ as your goal when you

can achieve that at any point in your life.”

“So what is your goal?”

“I decided to help others become happy. Not *everyone*, mind you. That’d be ridiculous. But I think I can help others achieve happiness with this ridiculous body of mine.”

“With that body?”

“Yeah. There are a lot of oppressed races out there, and I have every one of them inside me. I think I might be able to do something with that.”

“Yeah...maybe. At the very least, it’s true that you do have every race inside you.”

“If I can’t, then that’s fine. This is just an idea, after all.”

I was starting to figure out why I got such a weird vibe from him. He felt directionless. Like he had no will to live. Was this the result of having such a unique past?

“So that’s why I’m gonna destroy this sandbox the gods play around in. I don’t care about them, or being a demon king, or being a hero. I’m gonna bring it all down. That’s why I gave up being the demon king. It’s all so I can destroy this world.”

Interesting. I don’t hate that kind of extreme thinking, but destroying everything isn’t one of my interests. Also, he’s given me a lot of information. Is that okay?

“I don’t get why you’re telling me all of this. How does this benefit you?”

“Oh, I see. You want to know how I’m going to compensate you for helping me out.”

Helping him out?

“I’m not crazy enough to think about destroying the world by myself, especially with the kinds of divine punishments I have. Plus, after meeting a certain someone, I’ve changed my way of thinking.”

“Who?”

The demon king grinned and pointed at me. “You.”

Huh? Why me? “You think I’m gonna help you destroy the world? That’s a pretty big assumption you’re making.”

“No—I’m not asking you to help.” The demon king slowly lowered his finger. “I’m saying that, with the way you’re going, you’re gonna destroy it whether you intend to or not...which means my goal will be accomplished.”

“And that’s why you want to compensate me?”

“Exactly. All you have to do is live by any means possible, even if it means crushing others in your path. Just keep walking the path that you’ve been walking.”

I should’ve been offended or angry, but instead, I could feel the edges of my mouth curling upwards. “You really came all the way out

here to tell me this? I would've done it even without you telling me to."

"Ha! I knew you'd say that!" He looked at me the way a dad would look proudly at his son, and laughed.

"But," I added, "I'm gonna need more information, or this won't be a fair trade."

"Jeez..." He let out a sigh and chuckled. "That's just like you... Fine. Ask me anything."

Sweet! Let's get some more questions answered!



The sun had set and it was growing dark outside.

"Kiri!" The door to Inori's room was flung open. It was Fanatique. "He's not here either..." she said.

"You should knock first. It's the least you could do in terms of etiquette," Ariya said, scolding her.

"I'm his teacher, so I think it's fine."

Ariya let out a sigh. "What does that have to do with anything?"

"What about you? Isn't it strange for you to have a key to his room?" Fanatique asked, looking straight at Ariya.

"I asked to borrow it from the innkeeper. It's completely above board," Ariya responded, spinning the key around her finger.

She'd kept a spare key just in case there was an opportunity to kill Inori. However, she had no clue that she'd invited a lot of misunderstandings by telling the innkeeper that she needed a key in order to "sneak into his room at night." She also hadn't caught on to why the innkeeper grinned at her whenever she saw Ariya in the morning.

"Where did he go? He wasn't at the guild either."

"Why did he even run away?" Ariya asked, frowning.

Fanatique nodded, just as nonplussed, and entered the room. Ariya tried to call out to stop her, but it was too late. She'd already sat down on Inori's bed. The light from outside came through the windows, casting faint shadows across the sheets.

"So, this is the bed he sleeps on... Wonder what it smells like."

"Huh? Wait!" Ariya exclaimed as Fanatique buried her face in Inori's pillow and took breath after breath.

"Yep—this is Kiri's smell."

"What are you doing...?" Ariya asked, in a surprisingly low voice.

"Just checking," Fanatique said. Then she moved on to the sheets.

"Knock it off," Ariya said flatly, grabbing Fanatique by the collar and pulling her away.

"Yep. That's Kiri's scent."

"Of course it is. Are you stupid?"

“But...” Fanatique turned to Ariya. “I’m picking up a faint hint of you too.”

Ariya jumped a little, going red. She knew that the smell Fanatique was picking up was from *those* episodes. It wasn’t sex, but they’d done almost everything aside from going all the way. She’d done things that were embarrassing enough to make her flush.

“So you two really *are* in that kind of relationship,” Fanatique said, narrowing her eyes.

“N-No, we’re not!”

At the very least, Ariya had yet to even kiss Inori, let alone enter a full physical relationship with him. Although she wanted to explain the situation in her own words, she was still very pure and found it embarrassing to do so. But her reaction would have made anyone think that they were indeed in a physical relationship, and that was exactly what Fanatique thought.

“Listen, Ari... I’m gonna be real with you,” Fanatique said, suddenly serious, which helped Ariya recover from her embarrassment. “I think you should stay away from Kiri.”

“Huh?” Caught off guard, Ariya immediately countered, “Why should I care what you think?”

The truth was that she couldn’t leave him even if she wanted to. She served Inori and couldn’t be free until she’d become stronger than him. Plus, since she had every intention of leaving Inori, what she *should* have said was probably just, “Who cares?” But her first, most immediate thought was that Fanatique’s opinion didn’t matter in the slightest.

“I’m Kiri’s teacher, so it has everything to do with me.” It annoyed Ariya that she was once again bringing up the “teacher” thing. “No matter how I look at it, you’re holding him back. To be honest, I’m pissed at you.”

“And why is that?” Ariya asked.

“Kiri can’t use magic tools at all. In this day and age, that’s really rare. He was probably born without the ability to use them. Plus, you said that you two have ‘history,’ which only leads me to believe that you two have known each other from a young age.” Ariya’s brow was furrowed, but Fanatique ignored this, continuing, “I don’t know why, but you two decided to become adventurers. However, since Kiri can’t use magic tools, he can’t fight, right? So you’ve pretty much kept him in the guild while looking after him.”

It wasn’t too crazy a story, and it certainly might have looked true from Fanatique’s standpoint. Also, since Ariya wasn’t able to explain their circumstances, it may as well have been the truth. So Ariya stayed quiet and let Fanatique keep talking.

“And now look what’s happened. Because you babied him, he’s

ended up in this pitiful state. He's not as unsalvageable as everyone says he is. After spending time with him these past few days, I can tell that he's been putting on an act. All this time, he's wanted to enjoy himself. He's probably only spending time with me because it's a way for him to get out of the guild and have fun." Fanatique looked at Ariya again. "You're at fault for holding him down. It's like you're codependent. Your relationship is warped...or maybe it's just *you* that's warped."

Ariya had no desire to debate her claims. But even though she didn't understand what Fanatique meant, the word "warped" seeped into her mind.

"By letting him become someone everyone hates, you're making it so that no one will ever approach him. That way, you can keep him bound and dependent on you, so that he can never leave you. It's sick."

Her claims were all nonsense. They were so far from the truth it was laughable. Even so, why couldn't Ariya say anything? Why were her words caught in her throat?

"Well... At least, that's what I imagine is going on. Probably it's just my own delusions." Fanatique's expression softened, but Ariya still had no words. "Either way, though, I'm not lying when I say I want to help Kiri out. I want him to become strong enough to stand on his own two feet, and I think for that to happen, you need to leave." Before she could continue, though, she was interrupted.

"But you're not helping Kiri out of the goodness of your heart."

"Huh?"

"If anything, you just wanted a quality student. Kiri's nothing but a pupil to you. He'll never be an equal in your eyes."

Fanatique brought her hand to her chin and began to think.

"Mm... You have a point. I have always liked the relationship between teacher and student. Is it a bad thing to see a student as a student, though?" She smiled as if she was laughing at herself. "Then again, I do have a plan."

"And what's that?"

"I'm hoping that Kiri will become a Holy Knight if he straightens up enough."

"A...Holy Knight?" Ariya tried to imagine this, but it was too difficult. She shook her head. "Impossible. There is absolutely no way."

"Yeah... I agree. At first, I thought he was just a brat that needed a good scolding, but..." Fanatique's next few words seemed to trip her up. Her cheeks turned slightly pink. "He's a lot more obedient than he looks, and...he has his cute moments too."

Ariya stared at her silently. Panicking, Fanatique changed the

subject. “But having more Holy Knights isn’t a bad thing! It’d mean fewer monsters and a more peaceful life for humans. Everyone would be happy.”

“Peace?”

“Yeah. I want all humans to be happy. I believe that’s the ultimate desire of god.”

“Peace...” Ariya mumbled again. A dark smile came to her face. “I think it’s impossible for peace to bring everyone happiness.”

“There’s no way for you to know that.”

Ariya chuckled. “It’s because Kiri’s around that it’s impossible. If you want everyone to be happy, you’ll have to kill him.”

At the sight of Ariya’s unsettling smile, Fanatique took an unconscious step backwards. “Why is that...?”

“That’s because Kiri is much, much more—”

“When are you two going to leave my room?”

At this sudden voice, both Ariya and Fanatique yelped in surprise.

“Hello...?” said Inori. He was sitting boldly on his bed, holding a book that he’d presumably been reading.

“H-Huh? Kiri?! How long have you been here?” Fanatique was utterly confused. She should’ve noticed if he’d come through the door...and yet there he was.

“Uh, from the start.”

“No, you weren’t! I definitely would’ve noticed!”

“I was under the covers.”

“Like I wouldn’t notice *that*. I didn’t even sense your presence.”

“Well, I’m good at stealth.”

While Fanatique and Inori bickered back and forth, Ariya figured out what had really happened. He’d been sleeping in the shadow of the bedcovers the entire time.

“How long were you listening to us?” Fanatique asked.

“From the beginning.”

At these words, Fanatique began to panic. “U-Uh, did I say anything too embarrassing?”

“I might have...” Ariya lamented.

Both of their faces lit up with embarrassment.

The one saving grace was that Inori didn’t look bothered by any of it. “Come on, out you both go. Especially you, Sister Sensei. It’s night, after all.”

“Okay...”

“Understood.”

And with that, the two of them left, not willing to say anything else under Inori’s cold gaze.



After confirming with Detect that the two of them were far away enough, I called out to the other person that I'd detected earlier.

"They're gone." *Well, I guess Ariya's just in the other room, but whatever. Close enough.*

The window opened and a cool breeze blew in, along with a woman. She had beautiful silver hair that danced in the wind and twinkled in the moonlight. Beneath it, I caught glimpses of the long ears that were unique to her race.

She giggled lightly. "So you knew I was here? Thank you for chasing those two away." Furuth's smile was enchanting, but my eyes were drawn to her clothes.

"What's up with your outfit?"

"I came for a night visit. I needed to be dressed appropriately."

She'd been wearing thin clothing when I met her previously, but now she was wearing clothes so delicate that they may as well have been transparent. I could easily see the lines of her body. Suddenly she trembled, and gripped her body with both arms. *Did she feel my eyes on her or something?*

"That cold stare of yours is so good..."

"Uh-huh." I hadn't intended to look at her like that. If anything, I'd thought I was looking at her with fiery lust, but I guess not.

Furuth's cheeks were a light shade of pink as she approached me on the bed. "I've used spirit magic so that nobody—not even the girl next door—can hear us."

"Good to know." It was certainly perfect that she'd come to me at night. I took off the eye patch covering my left eye.

"You're very handsome..." She got on the bed and leaned up against me.

"You're not too bad yourself."

"Oh, how honest."

"I'm not one to spurn a woman's advances."

She began to stroke my body with a slender finger. Thanks to my training, I'd put on some muscle. I looked straight into her eyes, and she looked back at me. Our faces were so close that we could feel each other's breath. I reached around and placed my hand on the back of her head, and she moved her hand onto my back. Still staring into each other's eyes, we drew so close that our eyelashes almost touched. That was when I used my Eye of Sigils.

This close, at a moment like this, there was no way she could avoid it or flee. Plus, I was holding her head in place. I activated my hypnosis spell. My eye released a bright yellow light, and I began to enter her mind...or not? I could tell that this wasn't a matter of her having a resistance to it—rather, it just didn't work at all.

Impossible! It doesn't work on her?

“Wha—”

Just as I tried to say something, she pressed her lips against mine, and I felt my consciousness sink deeper and deeper into darkness.

When I opened my eyes, I found I had to shut them again right away because of a bright white light. I slowly opened them again, squinting as I waited for them to adjust.

“Where am I...?”

The place was unfamiliar. I was in a field, and each one of the blades of grass was glowing. The light they emitted wasn’t man-made. It was as if they’d captured the light from the stars and were emitting that. Because of its brightness, I couldn’t even tell what color the grass was.

The scenery above me was just as mysterious as the grass. The sky definitely wasn’t blue. It was just as white as the space around me, but not white like clouds were white. It was a little too bright for it to have been cloudy, anyway. *It’s seriously bright here.*

Looking around, there were no clues as to where I was. The last thing I remembered before losing consciousness was Furuth pressing her lips against mine. Wait, had she kidnapped me? Drugged me? What was going on?

“How are you feeling?” Suddenly, there was a silver-haired beauty dressed in raiment in front of me.

“Who are you?” Given context clues, this was more than likely Furuth. But her face was slightly different from what I remembered. Furuth was already gorgeous, but this woman was somehow even more so. Her beauty was almost unrealistic.

“I suppose this is the first time we’ve met me in this form, so I can’t fault you for not recognizing me.”

“So you *are* Furuth, then?”

“Well, more accurately, I am a spirit that’s taken over her body.”

Oh, right. She is Spirit Possessed.

“I am Sylph, the highest-ranking wind spirit.”

Appraisal.

Sylph Spirit (Wind Spirit of the Highest Rank)

HP: 23/23 / MP: 9653/10291 / STR: 9

VIT: 12 / DEX: 9821 / AGI: 7853 / INT: ?

Divine Blessing(s): Ordinance of the Chief God,

Oracle (greater)

Titles: Spirit Priestess

She really was a spirit. Her stats were all over the place, though. I bet if I sneezed, she’d be *blown* away. *Get it? Because she’s a wind spirit.*

“So what does a great spirit like you want with me?” I asked.

“I told you—a night visit.”

This felt different from the night visits I was familiar with. Usually, those were all about getting into somebody’s pants, not abducting them or whatever this was. Seriously, where *was* I?

“It would have been fine for me to engage in these activities in my other form. However, I thought it would only be proper for me to be in my true form for our first time together.”

“That doesn’t sound like any kind of etiquette I’ve ever heard of.”

“Never mind that. I invited you into this spirit realm in order to show you my true form.”

A *what now?* “Okay, Google, search for ‘spirit realm.’”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about...but a spirit realm is a separate dimension. Everyone has their very own spirit realm.”

Still not getting it. “Can you explain it like I’m five?” I asked.

“You’re in something like a dream.”

“Got it.”

So, in essence, this was a space that connected our dreams. Or maybe I’d been swallowed into her dream?

“Well, I certainly hope you don’t fully understand.” *Why not?*

“Moving on... We won’t be interrupted here. We can take all the time we’d like. And the pleasure you’ll feel here is incomparable.”

“Yeah, about that... Sorry, but I have no plans to participate in whatever *this* is.”

“Oh, really? I thought you weren’t in the business of spurning the advances of women.”

“Yeah, but I’m also not in the business of picking something poisonous up off the street and popping it in my mouth.”

“How disappointing,” Sylph said with a smile. “But you don’t have a choice in the matter.”

She snapped her fingers, and suddenly, I couldn’t move. It reminded me of what had happened to me with the Mario brothers from one of the worlds I’d been summoned to previously. This was a lot stronger, though.

“This isn’t *your* dream. It’s *my* world. And I can move your body however I’d like.” She began moving her fingers, and my body moved with them.

“Mm, not really a fan of being on the receiving end. I’d much rather be in the driver’s seat.”

“Don’t worry. Soon, you’ll just be experiencing pleasure so good, you’ll lose your mind.” Sylph walked towards me, an eerie smile on her face. “Doing it with your clothes on sounds fun, but...let’s take them off.”

“You really think I’m gonna do that?”

“Do you still not understand how much control I have?” Sylph snapped her fingers and my shirt immediately disappeared.

Oh my. “Uh, wait. Seriously. What the hell?!”

“I have control over this entire space...and that means your clothes too.”

That’s not what I’m asking about. Sylph snapped her fingers again and my underwear disappeared from inside my pants. *It’s so breezy down there!*

“Heh heh. So you’re naked under there, are you?” she giggled, teasingly.

“Don’t laugh. What the hell kinda role-play is this?”

“Role-play? What is that?”

“You’re enjoying slowly stripping me and getting turned on by my reactions.” What was this, anyway? A stripping game?

“Sure, I am certainly having a good time, and getting aroused.”

I couldn’t care less about your fetishes.

“Well then, last to go will be your pants... I suppose it’d be better to leave your socks on?”

“I don’t need whatever form of pity that you think you’re giving me! If you’re gonna strip me, strip *everything* off! Not that I want to be stripped in the first place!”

It’s not like there was a huge demand for that kind of thing, anyway. Plus, I hated the idea of being naked except for socks. She snapped her fingers again, and this time my socks and pants disappeared along with her clothes.

“Yours too?”

“It wouldn’t be fair if you were the only one naked.”

I really do not care about what’s fair right now. But then again, this was an image I wanted to remember, so I used Photographic Memory to save her naked body for later. Meanwhile, Sylph latched onto me and rubbed my abdomen softly with her cold fingers. I could feel her warm breath in my ear. I felt biological arousal, but even stronger than that was my displeasure.

“Stop,” I said.

“No way.” An enchanting smile spread across her face. “I’m going to put your soul under my control.”



The chief god could give ordinances to priestesses and anyone who had the Oracle Divine Blessing. These ordinances were considered “advice,” so it didn’t count as direct interference. For this ordinance, the chief god had chosen Sylph, the being closest to god as well as the one with the highest level of Oracle.

Through Oracle, she’d told Sylph to either kill Inori Takafuji or

bring him under her control. Spirits may have been beings that originated from magic, but he had eight world factors. Killing him wouldn't have been an easy task.

Humans did not have a strong connection to the spirit world, which meant that within this space, spirits had the upper hand. That's why Sylph had brought Inori into her own spirit world. She'd planned to take control over his mind there and carry out her ordinance.

She'd possessed Furuth, an elf with a strong connection to spirits, and gotten close to Inori. From the way he looked at her body, she could immediately tell that he had a sexual appetite. The only thing she needed to do then was trap him with her charm. Everything on that front had gone well, and as a result, she'd managed to take Inori into her spirit world.

She'd been surprised to find that he'd had the same idea as her, though. She hadn't expected that he'd try to use his magic eyes to dominate her psyche. If Inori had anything else up his sleeve, or if he'd tried to fight her, she would've most likely lost. She had to hide her surprise and pretend like she wasn't shaken at all.

She began touching Inori, a leisurely smile on her face. In the spirit world, direct contact meant she had direct access to his feelings and thoughts. As much as she was enjoying going through them one by one, there was something that caught her eye.

"Hm? You hate sex?"

Inori jumped a little.

Sylph couldn't believe it. Inori didn't even try to hide his lust...but he hated sex? "Why can't you be as faithful to your instincts up *here* as you are down *here*?"

"You're barking up the wrong tree."

"Are you scared of something? Of pleasure? Of being connected? Of pregnancy? Of becoming tainted?" Sylph asked, ignoring his words. "Don't worry; sex is just a ritual to create offspring. Gods and religions all accept it. Plus, it feels good," she said gently into his ear. "Let's feel good together."

Before she could begin, however, Inori said something in an unemotional voice. "Conqueror."

"Huh?" Sylph's body froze. Her arousal disappeared, and her eyes widened.

She saw Inori's body—or, more accurately, the shape of his body. His real body wasn't in this world. This was all a dream. Sylph was a spiritual being—the highest-ranked spirit—but she couldn't tell what exactly was happening before her.

He slowly stood up, unbound. His body shook. It was like it wasn't a solid shape anymore, like he'd turned into black liquid merely in the form of a person. His entire body was black from toe to head, as if he

was absorbing all the light around him.

“What...are you?” Sylph fell to her knees, trembling in the face of this unknown being and the pressure he exerted.

The strangeness didn’t end there, though. The air around his feet started to change, the once beautiful grass turned black, then bloodred roses began to bloom. The previously clear air felt heavy, and a black mist began to envelop the area. The light from above disappeared, and black clouds began rolling in.

“This is my world... Why? What’s going on? Why is my world being devoured?” Sylph could do nothing more than stare in terror as her world changed, consumed by the mysterious darkness. Shadows spread over everything. No longer was it a beautiful, fantastical space, but a shadow world of death, bereft of light.

Sylph heard the sound of footsteps from the source of despair that’d appeared before her. Each step he took killed the grass he stepped on and spread the black mist further.

“No... Stay away...” Sylph practically cried, but her pleas fell on deaf ears.

“You tried to control me...so you must’ve been prepared for the opposite to happen, right?” Inori’s voice rang in her head.

“You... How? You took control of my world? Wait—did you take control of yourself?! Being able to take command of your own soul is something only gods can do—”

“Shut up!” The black shadow devoured Sylph.

There was a soft knock on the door. “Inori, I wanted to ask you about the gun you bought today... Huh?”

Ariya stared at the scene in front of her—an almost naked woman was with Inori in bed, sharing a passionate kiss. “I-Inori?!”

Her words disappeared into the darkness of night.

Chapter 4

I felt my eyes coming open—a sign that I’d returned from the spirit realm. And I awoke to being lip-locked with an elf. Furuth—well, I guess more accurately, Sylph in Furuth’s body—looked different from how I remembered her. This was especially true for her face. I’d remembered her being a knockout beauty, but now her eyes were white, and her pale features were dirty with tears and snot. Her face also twitched every now and then. *Kinda nasty.*

As much as I wanted to push her away, I was trying to finish using Conqueror on her right now. I couldn’t stop kissing her, or I risked interrupting this process. I glanced to the side and saw Ariya staring at us as if in a daze from the doorway.

As soon as our eyes met, I could tell she wanted to ask me something, but given the situation I couldn’t really lend her an ear...or rather, my mouth was a little too preoccupied to answer. It felt bad for her to have no context with which to interpret this situation, but I needed her to be patient. With that in mind, I raised my hand and signaled her to wait.

Backtracking a little, I was surprised to learn that Conqueror worked in the spirit realm. I’d kinda only tried it out on a whim, but it seemed to work...a little too well, actually. Things looked like they were getting out of control, though honestly, from my perspective, I still felt firmly in the driver’s seat.

Still, something felt off. I shouldn’t have been able to use Conqueror on living things. Did that mean spirits didn’t count as living things? At the very least, they had souls. If one were to define living things as beings which possessed souls, then it made no sense that I was able to do this.

I had no confidence that I could replicate what I’d just done either. Now, all I was trying to do was prolong the effects of what I’d started in order to hold Sylph down. I had no clue how I’d managed to accomplish this, but I wasn’t about to stop just yet.

Maybe it was *because* I’d been in the spirit realm that I was able to use Conqueror like this. It was taking a while, though. Ever since I’d returned to reality, I could feel that the speed at which Conqueror was moving had slowed to a crawl. I knew I only needed a little more before it was fully complete, but my progress was struggling to cross the finish line. It was like a download being stuck at ninety-nine point

nine-nine percent.

Oh no—Ariya was starting to get pissed. Even if there were no romantic feelings involved, it didn't change the fact that I'd been sharing a kiss with this person for longer than was comfortable...especially when the other person was twitching like she was.

But finally, after what felt like an eternity, Conqueror was done. I pulled my mouth away and Furuth's body went limp against me, as if she'd been reduced to a husk. She was fairly heavy and dirty, so I pushed her away across the bed.

"Care to explain?" Ariya asked. Her low voice clearly indicated she was not a happy camper.

However, I wasn't able to answer her yet—there was something in my mouth. I spit whatever it was out into my palm. Imagine my surprise when it turned out to be a black-haired figurine in a black dress, covered in my saliva. *Hm? A figurine?* It was about the right size, but looked more human than a figurine...not to mention it was alive.

It'd probably be faster to get answers from whatever this thing was, but I had to wait for it to regain consciousness. I pinched the collar of her dress and picked her up, but still there was no response.

"What is that?" *Oh no, Ariya's voice is so cold it's basically at freezing point. Could you take it easy?! It's not like I'm a freak who enjoys sticking figurines in his mouth.*

"A spirit... I think."

"A spirit?!"

The thing in my hand that so looked like a figurine was Sylph...or at least, that was my guess. However, thanks to Conqueror, her once silver hair and porcelain skin were dyed black, so it was kinda hard to tell. She didn't wake up even after I swung her like a pendulum. I was starting to get impatient, so I activated Sexual Prowess and let my fingers do the rest.

"Hyah?!" She screamed as she awoke. "What's going on...?" She cautiously surveyed the room. When her eyes landed on me, holding her up between my fingers, she froze. "U-Uh, I...I'm so sorry! Please forgive me!"

She was incredibly scared. Had I done something to warrant this extreme of a response? All I'd done was threaten her, use Conqueror, and sexually harass her a little... *Oh. Hm.*

I waited for Sylph to calm down before asking her to explain the situation... And I also had to wait for Ariya to calm down after she made a fuss about how I'd managed to use Conqueror on a spirit.

"So, basically, you were ordered by god or someone to get close to

me and take me out?" I asked.

"Well, that's a bit of an oversimplification, but yes." Sylph nodded at my summary of her explanation.

It was clear now that whatever higher power existed here saw me as an enemy. I could barely hide my excitement! It was a little early to be taking on the last boss, though. As I was, I had little to no chance of winning.

"So, can you let go of me already?" Sylph asked. She'd completely recovered from her confusion from before.

"Oh, fine..."

"Thanks. Heh. I'm free again. As long as I'm more cautious, there's no way I'll be caught by a human." *Hm, she's acting very full of herself now.*

"H-Huh?" Ariya tried to grab her but grabbed air instead. It was as if Sylph's body was a hologram. Ariya continued to try to catch her but had no success. All she earned were giggles from Sylph as she watched Ariya struggle.

"You lost the minute you let go of me."

She was so full of herself, it was starting to get on my nerves. I immediately snatched her out of the air.

"Wha— How?!"

"No clue. Maybe Conqueror has something to do with it."

She wriggled around in my hand, trying to break free, but eventually gave up when she realized it was pointless.

"You're almost like a doll when your mouth is closed," Ariya said, fawning over Sylph now that she'd been captured. Ariya probably liked cute things.

Saying she looks like a doll, though...? That's the pot calling the kettle black there, Ariya.

"You're smaller than I remember," I said.

"This is how big spirits normally are." Sylph turned her attention to Ariya. "Hey, could you stop petting me now?"

"Oh, sure," Ariya said, her voice tinged with disappointment.

So, a spirit of this size had taken over an elf. It was probably because we were in the spirit realm that she'd been able to take on the size she'd had before. Given that it was essentially a dreamworld, she could probably take on any appearance she wanted.

Apparently, the title of Spirit Priestess wasn't for elven priestesses who served spirits, but rather for the spirits who served god as priestesses. This meant that the title of Spirit Priestess was actually Sylph's and not Furuth's. *She got dragged into this whole thing without even knowing what was going on. Whether it was your first or not, sorry about stealing a kiss from you.* I looked down at Furuth with pity, then realized something.

“Did her face change?” I asked.

“Maybe you feel that way because of that horrible expression she’s wearing?”

True, her face was tear-streaked and twisted in agony, but it was her facial structure itself that seemed different to me. Her chest also looked like it’d shrunk.

“Oh—that’s because I possessed her,” Sylph chimed in. “When a high-tier spirit like myself possesses someone, their appearance changes to match mine.”

Now that she mentioned it, combining their faces in my mind produced something that kinda looked like the face of the Furuth I had met.

“That shows you just how beautiful I am,” she said, puffing out her chest with pride.

That kinda pissed me off, so I used Sexual Prowess again and let my fingers do the rest.

Soon, with each stroke of my fingers Sylph was moaning pitifully. *This is...kinda fun. I hope this doesn't awaken anything in me.* I was really hoping it wouldn't, because Ariya was looking at me with disgust on her face. Either way, this was supposed to be a sort of punishment for Sylph, so I kept it up. I turned to Ariya, with Sylph's moans providing a kind of backing track.

“Oh yeah—did you need something?” I asked, recalling the fact that she'd probably come to my room in order to ask me something.

“Right. I wanted to see how you planned to use the gun.” There was a twinkle of excitement in Ariya's eyes.

She possessed my knowledge, so to a certain extent, she understood the strength, builds, and history of guns. She had pure curiosity for witnessing what she'd learned about from my knowledge with her own two eyes.

“I would especially like to see how you combine your dark magic with your use of the gun.”

“Well, don't expect too much. I can't guarantee any real results.” I already had a feeling that things wouldn't work the way I expected. There was no reason I couldn't try, though.

“It's too late to go out now, so we'll do some experimentation tomorrow. We can also test out her powers.” I looked down at Sylph with the intention of continuing the conversation with her, but apparently she'd passed out.

“Hmm, maybe I can 'rouse' her awake again.”

“Don't. Seriously,” Ariya said, stopping me with surprising firmness. Apparently, Sexual Prowess was a stronger Skill than I'd expected.





“How does this request sound?” Ariya asked.

“There’s no open space there. We should go for this one instead,” I said.

The next day, Ariya and I stood in front of the job board and tried to find one that would allow me to test out my gun. For us to do so, we’d have to slip out of town at night. This wasn’t too hard for me, since I could teleport away or travel through the shadows, but Ariya couldn’t do either of those things. She needed a pretense to be active at night. With that in mind, we were looking for suitable jobs that would give us a reason to leave.

I’d brought Sylph with us, and though she popped her head out of my pocket at times, she didn’t catch anyone’s attention. I had the fact that she more or less blended in with my black shirt to thank for that.

What happened to the elf that she’d possessed, you might be wondering? Well, as soon as she woke up, I used my hypnosis on her to manipulate her memories and sent her on her way. I was glad that I was able to hypnotize her easily, without any problems. Maybe the confusion she felt when she awoke helped to make her mind more vulnerable, so I had no trouble hypnotizing her this time around.

“Oh, you took this job not too long ago, right?” I asked, pointing to one of the papers on the board. “Harvesting dawn flowers.”

“Yes. Last time, I accidentally stumbled across a small clearing where they grow. This one might be a good choice since we know where to find them, and there’ll be an open space.”

Dawn flowers only bloomed in the few moments before the sun rose. They were apparently used in medicine, and they were most efficacious at full bloom, but it was hard to harvest them since there was a very small window when they bloomed.

“Hm... Not bad. That would leave us plenty of time to test things out.”

“I’ll go accept the job, then,” Ariya said, taking the piece of paper and walking it over to the reception desk.

While we waited for her to return, I began eavesdropping, listening for any hot gossip going around the guild. There was talk about Holy Knights, about prostitutes, about monsters, about Kiri looking at the job board, about Kiri finally getting off his ass and taking a job, about how only Black Rose had gone to the reception desk, about how it was possible that Kiri wasn’t actually taking a job after all—the usual scattered gossip. *Man, these guys have such a low opinion of me.*

“Kiri,” said Ariya as she returned, “I also accepted a skeleton

suppression request.”

“Hm, okay. That’s fine.” Skeletons were easy to take down, so I had no problem with that.

“We’ll be able to camp out for two days without arousing any suspicion.”

“I don’t think I need a whole two days to experiment, but it’ll be nice to pair up again. It’s been a while.” Perhaps there was a need for me to reconsider how I fought, though, now that Sylph was in the mix.

Suddenly, the doors to the guild were flung open, and an adventurer fell upon the floor.

“Hm? A newbie?”

“Did something happen?”

The guild members began to stir restlessly.

“Stampede! The Stampede is here!” the newbie screamed, jumping to his feet.

“Huh? The Stampede?” Though the newbie seemed very desperate and frightened, the other guild members just looked at him doubtfully.

“You sure about that? Shouldn’t be happenin’ this year.”

“You have one too many, bud?”

No one seemed to be taking him seriously. Some even called him a pussy. *Ow!* Okay, that was me, and I got a kick from Ariya for it. In the meantime, the girl from the reception desk approached the newbie.

“You are from the F-ranked party, Lord of Horizon, correct?” *Whew, what a name.* “Are you certain that you saw the Stampede and not just a group of beasts? If so, we must take action.”

“Y-Yeah—there were *five* skeletons. Plus, we could sense a lot of...something around them. It was definitely a whole horde of monsters—”

“Oh, you dumb kid...”

“That’s normal shit.”

“Nothing new. Happens every now and then.”

These words from various adventurers seemed to surprise the newbie.

“I apologize,” said the girl from the reception desk, “but I must conclude that the likelihood of what you witnessed being the Stampede is low.”

“Wh-Why?!”

“It is a normal occurrence for skeletons to appear around Regin. And the presence you felt most likely came from the wolves.”

“Huh?”

“After a skeleton kills a human, they do not consume them as

other monsters may. Instead, they leave them where they lie. Wolves follow the skeletons to eat the carcasses of the things they slay. There is not a high level of danger, and this is not too out of the ordinary. Thus, I would say that the probability of this being a sign of the Stampede is low.”

This guy was literally becoming the boy who cried wolf.

“This ain’t no place for kids who get freaked out by skeletons. Run on home and play adventurer with your little friends or somethin’.”

The guild erupted into laughter as they ridiculed the newbie, who left with his tail tucked between his legs.

“Hm... Maybe I should claim I saw the Stampede someday.”

“Please don’t. Are you *trying* to become the boy who cried wolf?”

Since the work on my weapon would apparently be completed the next day, I decided to spend the day training with Sister Sensei as usual. I didn’t understand how the turnaround on forging a weapon could be so quick, but I ultimately decided against thinking about it too much because hey, this *was* a fantasy world.

When night came, I teleported to where Ariya and I had agreed to meet. Ariya had apparently been using this space to practice her flying. She’d gotten pretty good at it too. *You can already do loops in the air... What the heck?*

“Wait long?” I asked.

“Not really.”

The conversation felt like a couple meeting up for a date. I pulled my gun out of Shadow Storage and began to prepare to use it, as was necessary for these kinds of antiquated guns.

“You finish the extermination job already?”

“I figured I might as well. I was able to slay quite a few of them. Could I store them in your Shadow Storage for now?”

“Yeah, sure. I’ll take care of it later.”

First, I wanted to try shooting the gun without using my dark magic. Most guns here used gunpowder, magic circles, and magic stones—they were essentially small magic tools. But since the magic used was just a simple fire spell and didn’t require that much mana, even normal humans could use them. That meant nothing to me, though, since I wasn’t able to use magic tools whatsoever.

I’d chosen a type of gun that *wasn’t* a magic tool—an arquebus. Its composition was simple, which made it easier for me to understand how it worked. Feed gunpowder into the tube, insert a lead ball, and then use the flintlock to ignite the powder. After loading the lead ball into the gun with a ramrod, you’d load the flash pan with gunpowder, then close the gun’s apron. Then, all that was left was to light the fuse. *It’s hard to tell if their level of technology has progressed quickly or if it’s*

slowed to a crawl.

“That looks quite annoying,” Ariya commented.

“That’s because it is.” It took a lot longer than any magic incantation. And sure, maybe I just wasn’t used to it yet, but that didn’t change how long it took to get these antiquated guns ready to fire.

These were the same kind of guns that Oda Nobunaga had been famous for using. The magic version of these guns had magic circles strategically built in, which helped to reduce the time that’d normally be spent on reciting an incantation. They were the most common types of guns used in wars, which made sense since this was a world where magic existed. Why wouldn’t they just use magic? But in that case, why did they need guns at all? Weren’t guns pretty much superfluous in the face of magic?

At any rate, I was ready to shoot. All I needed was a target. *Hm, that tree will work. The shot’s gonna miss anyway.* “Okay, I’m gonna fire.”

“All right.”

I made sure that Ariya had stepped behind me. Though it was unlikely, I didn’t want her to get hit by a stray shot or something. Then I pulled the trigger, making a loud bang. I followed the shot with Absolute Tracking and saw that it hit the far right of the tree trunk.

“Nope, not very accurate.”

“You really are hopeless at shooting,” Ariya commented, playing along.

It was the first time in a while that we’d gotten to banter with each other like this, and I was kinda happy about it. But anyway, the point was that regardless of my skill with guns, the way it was constructed made it hard to hit anything.

“I’ll try it with dark magic now.” I used Conqueror on the round so that I could use Puppet Master on it after it had been fired.

If I used Armament Craft, perhaps I could have used the limited knowledge I had to make a revolver, a rifle, or an automatic gun. But then I’d need cartridges. And a detonator. And neither of those things could be made with Armament Craft. Honestly, it might have been completely impractical to use a gun at all.

This time, thanks to my high DEX and the fact that I’d already done it once, I was able to load the gun quicker than before.

“Here I go again.” I pulled the trigger once more, and then used Puppet Master to move the shot around at incredible speeds.

“Is it working?” Ariya asked. Even if she was able to see in the dark, she couldn’t perceive objects moving at high speeds the way I could with my Eye of True Vision.

I slowed the shot down and had it circle Ariya’s head.

“It’s almost like a bug,” she commented.

That’s rude. But either way, now that I’d shown her what it looked like, I could return it to its original speed. It was almost like a magic bullet. After a while, I got bored and directed it right into the middle of a tree trunk. *Bull’s-eye. Hm? Wait, I can’t pull it back out.*

“It seems that the test was a success,” Ariya said.

“No, I’d call this a failure.”

“Why’s that?”

“I can’t retrieve it.” I wasn’t able to budge the shot from the tree trunk. “The impact changed its shape. Apparently that counts as breaking it.” Conqueror was dispelled when the object at hand was broken, meaning I could no longer use Puppet Master on it. This wasn’t all too surprising; I’d suspected as much. If I couldn’t retrieve my shots, then I was pretty much throwing each of them away. In that sense, my knives were much more bang for my buck.

“Couldn’t you make them more durable by using adamantite?”

“That’d be a waste of materials. Besides, using adamantite would lower the strength of the shot.”

“It would?”

Hm? Did she not know about mushrooming? She should have possessed my knowledge, though, so I didn’t understand why. Perhaps the knowledge I was able to transfer was limited somehow. Maybe all she got from me was stuff about manga, anime, and memes. Did she not receive what I’d learned in high school, and all the other random stuff I knew about? *Let’s test this out a bit.*

“Hey, Ariya, you hungry? I could go for some Sugandese.”

“Sug on deez nutz!”

“Oh, shut it.” *Why do you know this stupid joke, anyway?* “Okay, what can you tell me about the molecular composition of benzene?”

“Of...what?”

Interesting. I continued to ask her all sorts of questions, and I determined that she possessed the level of knowledge I had in middle school. She’d received a lot less from me than I’d expected. It was only in high school that I’d learned how guns worked, so it made sense that she didn’t know anything about it.

“Okay, that’s enough of that. Let me explain what mushrooming is.”

“Thank you.”

“So these kinds of bullets usually deform upon impact, and the shape they take resembles a mushroom. That’s mushrooming.”

Due to the bullet’s change in shape, its kinetic energy is converted into damage inflicted on the target. If, instead, it merely pierced the target without being destroyed in the process, it’d only leave a small hole. Though, of course, depending on the part of the body that was

shot, that might have been enough.

There were also hollow-point bullets that were designed to expand on impact, making the hit more lethal without necessarily penetrating deeply. And sure, this worked pretty well on humans, but on monsters? Not likely. Most monsters had hard carapaces that could only be pierced with certain objects. Just hitting them with hard objects wasn't enough, not to mention that your shots could just bounce right off. That's why armor-piercing rounds—bullets covered with soft armor to protect them until they had pierced their target—had been developed. Modern armor-piercing bullets operated by a different concept, however. For example, bullets used in the military were designed to maintain their shape and instead cause damage by penetrating armor.

I explained all this to Ariya as simply as I could.

“Either way, the point is that the bullet changes shape,” I concluded.

“I see...”

“Also, there's another problem when using guns. One is having to buy gunpowder all the time. I can make bullets whenever I want with Armament Craft, but not gunpowder.”

I'd heard that gunpowder could be made with charcoal, nitrate, and sulfur, but I didn't know the correct ratios I needed to combine them into gunpowder, so I couldn't craft it. Overall, it wasn't too practical.

“The other problem is that there's a limit to its power. I could increase my firepower by coating the gun with adamantite and using more gunpowder, but no matter how much strength I have, it won't change my weight. One way or another, I'd get blown away.”

“But what if you shoot upwards? Then your weight wouldn't matter, right?”

“It's not ideal. I can't change the vector of its kinetic energy with Puppet Master.” Which meant that anyone I was fighting would only need to defend themselves from attacks coming from below.

“Hmm... This is a tough nut to crack.”

“I'm not seeing how it'll be more useful than my knives anytime soon. I guess I can still use it as a sub-weapon during the daytime.” Even Sister Sensei had said the same after hearing that I had a gun.

“Well, I guess we're done with this for now.”

“I suppose. By the way...where is that spirit, Sylph?” Ariya asked.

“Sleeping in my shirt pocket.” Sylph had told me to wake her up when I needed her. She was way too free-spirited for someone who was under the effects of Conqueror. Maybe it had to do with her being a wind spirit.

“Hey, rise and shine, Sylph.” I gave my pocket a light tap, but

there was no response. I could hear her breathing as she slept, though. *Weren't you the one who told me to wake you up? What happened to that?* I pinched inside my pocket and pulled her out. Even though I shook her around, she didn't wake up. *How deeply are you sleeping?* At this point, there was only one thing left to do. I took my finger and...

"Hyah?!" *Oh, she woke up.* Sexual Prowess was such a useful Skill. "Wh-What was that for?!"

"You weren't waking up," I replied.

"You're gonna take responsibility if their shape gets messed up."

"I missed the part where that's my problem."

"It's time to figure out what your powers are."

At the very least, Sylph had said that she could prevent other people from eavesdropping with spirits. I was having her do that already, but I wanted to know what else she could do.

"Uh... I have some disappointing news. I can't use my spirit magic anymore."

Can't say I'm too surprised. "Because you can't get the spirits to obey you?" I asked.

"I can forcibly stop them from doing anything, but I can't command them to do anything for me. I can't seem to use magic or mana properly in this form."

Stopping the spirits from listening was the same thing that the demon king had done the other day.

"Can you help me sense spirits with Detect?"

"Hm... I think so." Suddenly, I felt as if Detect had become sharper. *Oh, so these are the spirits.* "Anybody contracted with a spirit can do this. Your Conqueror or whatever it's called counts as a contract. You can also do other things, like this..." Sylph raised her hand into the air and jet-black smoke appeared. "It's apparently called Black Wind."

"It looks like it's spinning," Ariya commented.

Makes sense, given the name.

Sylph Spirit (Wind Spirit of the Highest Rank)
HP: 2300/2300 / MP: 11237/13700 / STR: 9
VIT: 1200 / DEX: 9821 / AGI: 7835 / INT: 10291
Divine Blessing(s): Traitor to the Chief God
Titles: Fallen Spirit

So was she a Black Wind spirit, then? She may have lost her ability to control the wind, but in return, she'd gained the ability to control Black Wind. Her stats had barely changed, but her HP and VIT had been multiplied by a hundred. I could no longer joke about

sneezing and blowing her away.

She'd also gotten a new Divine Blessing and title. Though I wasn't sure why she was being labeled a traitor when it wasn't like she had chosen to defy the chief god's commands. Gods must have been extremely unforgiving.

"How much mana does Black Wind eat?" I asked.

"Basically none. You need to spend a little to start it up, but it's a lot less than what you'd expend on forcibly stopping eavesdropping," Sylph explained.

"What does it do?"

"It sounds like it could be poisonous," Ariya said warily, stepping away from it.

Sylph tilted her head. "Poisonous? Not at all. It's not even cloudy or heavy in any way. You can move it at will."

"So what does it do?"

"It's just a smoke screen."

That's disappointing. It has such a cool-sounding name, but the actual ability is pretty lame. "That's a letdown," I said.

"It's useful against enemies but loses its value when you have allies nearby. It sounds very weak," Ariya observed.

"Don't say that! It's not like I *chose* to have this power! I want to be able to control the wind too!" Sylph screamed at no one in particular, like she was venting. *Man, I feel kinda bad.*

I was partially responsible for her weakened state, but she was the one who'd come at me in the first place. It wasn't my fault.

"Hey Sylph, can I control it too?"

"Y-Yeah, you can. You might need an incantation, but since I'm a spirit of the highest rank, and Conqueror gives us a stronger connection, you might even be able to do it without an incantation."

I might as well test it out, then. I began generating Black Wind. It came out a lot easier than I'd expected. I tried expanding it, shrinking it, and changing it into all kinds of different shapes. It felt very similar to Puppet Master.

Apparently, as it turned out, Sylph was the one who was actually controlling its motions, and I was just feeding her orders with zero lag. Thanks to that, all the cognitive burden was put on Sylph, so none of my mental resources were consumed. Usually, using Puppet Master on nonsolid objects would take up a lot of mental resources, but not when it came to Black Wind. I could use Puppet Master to its maximum potential while Black Wind was being deployed simultaneously, since none of the burdens of controlling it fell upon me.

It was formless. Almost like a floating shadow... *Hm? Wait.* "Does that mean that...?"

“Huh?” exclaimed Sylph.

“Wh-What did you do?!” Ariya asked excitedly.

One of my knives emerged from the Black Wind. I’d been able to pull it out of my Shadow Storage that way.

“Black Wind has the same properties as my Shadow Storage.” I could use it just as I did Shadow Storage. Until now, I’d had to rely on shadows cast on the ground or walls, but now I could use an airborne shadow. This significantly increased the variety of actions I could take.

“Is it really useful for you at all, though?” Ariya asked.

“What do you mean? It’s extremely useful. It almost makes me want to apologize for making fun of Sylph.”

“I don’t know how I feel about this sudden change of opinion...”

“Let me show you just how useful it is.” I turned to Ariya, having thought of a new use for this. “We’re gonna save the job requests for later. Let’s gather some big rocks first.”

Ignoring the sounds of confusion both of them made, I used Detect to find rocks. I might have finally found a way to overcome my lack of firepower.

We’d spent the entire night collecting rocks, and it was now a new day. I remembered that my weapon should have been complete, so I decided to head back to town to take a look.

“Oh—so this is the part of town where you got it forged?” Sister Sensei remarked. *Yes, she’s tagging along.*

Unfortunately, Ariya had other requests to attend to, so she couldn’t come with me. This meant that I probably couldn’t lollygag like I’d been able to last time. I’d tried to insist that I’d go on my own, but Sister Sensei wouldn’t have it. She kept talking about how she was my teacher so she’d go with me. *I didn’t know teachers were stalkers. That’s news to me.*

“Oh, here it is.” I saw the same run-down shop that I’d visited the day before.

“Wow, you weren’t lying. I’ve been down this road a bunch of times, but I’ve never noticed this place before.” Sister Sensei tilted her head.

“I don’t blame you. It looks like a storage space.”

“Also, the stores around here feel intimidating.”

“You think so?”

None of the places here were especially dirty. I didn’t understand why she’d have a problem entering them. Then again, I guess people had different impressions of places. I nudged her into the shop she was so nervous about entering.

“Hey there,” I called out.

“Welcome, Sir Kiri. I’ve been expecting you.” The butler immediately greeted me as I entered. I was impressed that he could remember both my name and face after only meeting me once. Maybe it was because I was the only customer.

“I’m here to pick up my weapon.”

“Please wait a minute.” The butler returned to the back of the shop and came back moments later with something wrapped in cloth. “Here you are,” he said as he placed it on top of the counter.

He unfolded the cloth, revealing a massive, rugged long sword with a dull glow.

“Hm.” From what I could see with Appraisal, it was well made. I picked it up. Surprisingly, even though it was huge, it felt comfortable to hold.

I gave it a few test swings. Afterwards, the butler adjusted a few things, and then returned it to me.

“Oh?” It had become even more comfortable to wield, as if it were connected directly to my nerves. It felt alive. I suddenly understood what people meant when they said that their weapon was an extension of their body.

“This is amazing. How much do I owe you?”

“Here you are,” he said, handing me a piece of paper with the cost on it. *Wow, this is a lot cheaper than I’d expected.* I could pay for it with what I had on hand.

“Kiri...where’d you get that money from?” Sister Sensei asked suspiciously.

“Ariya.” *It’s mine, actually.*

“That’s not right. I said I’d pay for your weapon.”

“Huh? Really?”

“Of course. I’m your teacher!”

Who am I to stop her if she’s so gung ho about paying? I wasn’t about to thank her, though. This was all her decision.

“Oh—could you make me a weapon too?” she asked, turning to the butler.

But he shook his head. “To tell you the truth, I’m planning on moving this shop out of this town soon. I’ve already begun preparing for that. Sir Kiri will be my last customer.”

I guess business hadn’t been too great here. Then again, he needed to do something about the exterior of his store if he wanted to attract customers to check out the inside.

“Ah, that’s unfortunate.” Sister Sensei seemed genuinely disappointed.

With that, we left the shop.

“So what now? Should we train with weapons?”

Part of the reason she’d told me to buy one was so we could train

outside of the town with real weapons. I fully expected us to set out for that, but Sister Sensei shook her head.

“It’d be suicidal for you to suddenly try to fight with a weapon you’re not used to. We’re going to train as usual and just get you used to your new sword.”

Okay... Sheesh, I’m frickin’ tired.

“Mind filling us in on what you need all these rocks for?” Ariya asked.

“Yeah, I’d love to, but...”

To be honest, the problem was that I had nothing to test this out on.

I was almost certain that things would play out exactly as I thought they would, but I needed to make sure that the target I ran my test on was strong enough, otherwise I’d just be unleashing a powerful AOE attack for nothing and learn jack from the experience. That was why we were back to looking for huge rocks just like yesterday instead of testing things out.

I used Conqueror on the boulders that we found while simultaneously compressing them with Armament Craft, shaping them into spindles. Finally, I coated their tips with adamantite before throwing them into Shadow Storage.

“We’re still going? Don’t we have enough?” Ariya asked.

“The more the better. Oh, look, there’s a good one over there.”

“Great...” Ariya looked like she was thoroughly done with all this.

Ow! I was suddenly reminded that Sylph was sitting on top of my head. *Could you maybe not pull my hair?*

“Here’s another—”

“Master!” Suddenly, I heard the voice of one of my wolf thralls whom I’d stationed to stand watch outside of the range of Detect.

“What’s wrong?”

“You were right,” the wolf responded.

“About?”

“There’s a cluster of monsters gathering on the field,” the wolf answered.

“W-Wait. The Stampede?!” Ariya exclaimed.

Since the newbie from yesterday had been crying about it, I’d decided to have my wolves investigate.

“Fenrir.”

“Would you like me to take you theere?”

“Yeah.” I hopped on his back and grabbed Ariya’s hand. “Come on, you too. We’re gonna investigate.”

“O-Okay.” Ariya gripped my hand with some confusion.

I pulled her up onto Fenrir’s back, and she wrapped her arms

around me.

“Let’s go.”

“Yes, my masteeer!”

Fenrir ran in a straight line, mowing down anything in his way. It was pretty comfortable riding on him. Almost felt like I was on a theme park ride or something.

“U-Uh, Inori?” Ariya nervously called from behind me.

With her chest pressed against my back, I could feel the beating of her heart. And with all the rocking and bumping, I could *really* feel her chest against me. *Yeah, riding like this ain’t bad at all. I should do this more often.*

“What’s up?”

“How did you know that the Stampede was going to happen?” she asked curiously.

“As soon as the topic came up at the guild, I knew that the chance of it happening was high.”

“You based that off of the patterns in stories you’ve read, didn’t you?”

“Yep.”

“So this was really just...”

“A hunch. Yeah.”

Ariya let out a sigh of disbelief. *Oh, come on. Isn’t it fun when your hunch is right on the money? Also, can you not sigh in my ear? It tickles.*

To be honest, though, it wasn’t just a hunch. I have a reason why I thought the Stampede would happen, but I’ll keep that to myself for now. I had no proof of my theory—it might as well all have been in my head.

“Master, we are clooose.”

I looked straight ahead and saw that the once green field had turned red. And it seemed like it was moving. Most likely, there were a lot of monsters there.

“No way... It’s really the Stampede.” Ariya was obviously surprised.

I couldn’t blame her. This was certainly unexpected, and if the townspeople saw this, they would probably fall into despair.

“We don’t have any obligation to protect the town. According to the report I got from my wolves, they’re *all* heading towards Regin. That seems to be their only objective. So, what we’re gonna do is mess with them a bit, and then retreat when we get bored.” It really didn’t matter to me if Regin got messed up by this attack. “This isn’t a boss fight for us—it’s a bonus stage.”

We got into formation right in front of the horde of monsters. Fenrir and the other wolves grouped up, and Ariya had taken up a battle stance. At the front of the horde were huge bugs. *Yuck.* All

kinds of them too—centipedes, millipedes, spiders, pill bugs...but no insects. *Hm. Interesting.* They were all bugs that had more than six legs, which made it even grosser.

No Name / Bug Monster (Berserk Worm)
HP: 4367/4367 / MP: 1080/1080 / STR: 741
VIT: 5532 / DEX: 12 / AGI: 213 / INT: 5
Divine Blessing(s): Grace of the Demon King
Titles: None

I really wondered about that Divine Blessing. Did “Demon King” mean Ighnoa, that old guy I knew? Was he the one who had ordered this? No way, right? He’d die if he had. So what was that Divine Blessing about? I searched my memories of our conversation and suddenly remembered something he’d said about his Divine Blessing.

Apparently, it was a Divine Blessing possessed by all who served the demon king, and its power was directly proportional to the demon king’s strength. *Oh, please, no.* If they all had even a fraction of his strength, that’d spell trouble for me.

The bugs had especially high health. They’d be hard to kill, particularly with how hard their exoskeletons looked. As far as I could tell, all the bugs pretty much had the same stats. *Ugh, what a pain.*

“Listen up, guys. They have hard exteriors. Extremely hard exteriors. Also, there’s a crap ton of them. It’s not every day that you get to face off against these kinds of enemies,” I said, giving a pep talk to Fenrir, the wolves, and Ariya. “That is to say, this is an extremely important chance to experiment as well as a valuable training experience versus multiple enemies. Fenrir, you take command of the black wolves.”

“Understooood.”

“I doubt any of them are gonna go down too easily. I want you to come up with a strategy and work with the wolves to efficiently take them out.”

“Yes, my masterrr.”

“And, Ariya...”

“Yes?!” The way she answered made it hard to tell if she was excited or surprised.

“You can fight however you want. This’ll train you to fight multiple enemies at once by yourself. A trial by fire’s infinitely better than training with nothing at stake. I want all of you to use this experience well. Got it?”

“Yes!” Everyone replied. *It’s kinda fun to role-play some kind of commander.*

“I’ll fight too, but I have something else I wanna take care of. It’d

be best if you all assumed that I'm not participating in the battle." The cloud of dust kicked up by the monsters was much closer. "Okay, guys. Go for it!"

At my command, they all went off with their various instructions. This would be a great learning experience for everyone, especially Fenrir, who severely lacked any kind of strategic planning experience. It was the perfect opportunity for him to get some.

"I guess I'd better get to work," I said as I pulled out my long sword from Shadow Storage.

I'd already used Conqueror on it, but I was hesitant to use Armament Craft on it for fear of changing its composition. Also, I planned to use it during the day, so I didn't want it to stand out too much.

Single-Edged Long Sword (Creator: Sebastian)
Quality: A / Value: 14500 Dells

A long sword shaped like a nata. Its thick blade and rough appearance give it a distinct look.

I was surprised by its quality. That old guy was pretty good at his job. I picked up the sword and charged into the swarm of bugs.

They were making all kinds of disgusting sounds. *Ugh, please stop...* And they were all human-sized too. *Seriously gross.* Their bodies were covered in reddish-black glossy shells that glowed in the moonlight. *So mega gross.* Plus, they weren't *just* oversized versions of bugs; they had tentacle-like things at their mandibles that resembled sea cucumbers, and there was some kind of sticky fluid dripping from those appendages. *Gross. Gross. Gross! Gross!!!*

At any rate, I decided to try to fight one of the pill-bug-looking monsters. After enough slashing, I was able to determine that the best I could do was leave an indent on their exoskeletons. I wasn't able to slash through them, nor was I able to land any killing blows, evidenced by the pill bug still writhing around in front of me. Its health had decreased, but it had only taken about five hundred or so damage. *This isn't good.*

Suddenly, there was a screech from behind me.

"Oh, shut up!" A centipede jumped at me, but I swatted it away with my long sword.

It got back on its feet as if nothing had happened. *Their defenses are annoying. I need more firepower.*

"Magic doesn't work on them!" Ariya called out.

Had they been fortified to resist magic? I looked over at Ariya, who was slashing through the bugs with Shadow Zekkinotachi. She couldn't blow any of them away with magic, though, so they were

beginning to surround her. She was also much less efficient at using the blade than Aegiana had been, so she was exhausting a lot of mana. She'd run out sooner rather than later. *I guess they may be magic resistant, but not enough to block the magic of an Artifact.*

Ariya sliced off part of a bug, then devoured it using Vampirism to recover her mana. She looked utterly disgusted as she did this. *Yeah, I doubt that tastes good.* But at least with this strategy, she could make sure she never ran out of mana. *Also, she should go on Fear Factor or something. I'm seriously impressed she can eat them so easily.*

As for me, I used strings to tie up their legs, leaving them immobilized, then I beat them to death with my long sword. I began experimenting a bit and found that, although they had hard exteriors, the parts where their joints met were much softer. With that in mind, I decided to test some things out with my long sword.

I glanced at Fenrir. He was simply kicking the bugs around, biting them, trampling them—he was handling them with ease. This made sense given how high his STR was, especially compared to the bugs'. Apparently, he'd resorted to this because his ranged attack wasn't enough to insta-kill them. At best, it could wound them a little. So he'd given up on long-range attacks and was instead using the wolves to herd the bugs towards him so that he could kill them. *An effective strategy.* This was a good first step towards formulating better strategies. *Luckily these enemies have low intelligence.*

"Heya, Inori," Sylph called out to me, having completed the job I asked her to do.

"You found them?"

"Yep."

"Good job. Where?"

"Up there." Sylph pointed towards a small cliff. *Okay, let's do a quick raid,* I thought, before teleporting there.

"Hey, what're you doing here?" I called out playfully.

"Wha—"

Apparently this was the individual that Sylph had found. There wasn't anyone else around, anyway. There was just a brown-haired woman cloaked in a black robe. She was probably another beauty. She also had a horn growing from her head.

"Wh-Where did you come from?!" At once, she pointed her staff at me.

"Me? I'm just passing by."

"Yeah, right!"

"Well, if you don't believe me, that's fine. Anyway, there's a huge horde of monsters heading to Regin." I shot a look towards the field. "I can't help but find it *really* suspicious that you're watching all of

this from up here.”

“Hmph. Stop beating around the bush!” She raised her staff.

“Yeah, I was the one who summoned those monsters.”

Chris Chamsel / Demon Sorcerer (Hypnosis Contract)

HP: 57/57 / MP: 5023/15300 / STR: 1020

VIT: 980 / DEX: 870 / AGI: 58 / INT: 5900

Divine Blessing(s): Grace of the Demon King

Titles: Summoner, Avenger

A demon...sorcerer? This was the first time I'd seen this. Also, was this the same person I'd seen at the church that one time? She was wearing the same clothes, but she looked a lot less pale than she had back then. Oh—and then there was the horn growing out of her head too. Her race had also apparently changed from human to demon. Maybe that had something to do with it. She didn't seem like she remembered me. Maybe she'd remember Sister Sensei, though?

“So what's your plan? Are you going to turn me over to the Regin Church?” she asked as I swung my long sword diagonally in front of me, getting into a fighting stance. “Or do you plan to kill me? If so, I have bad news for you...” Suddenly, a magic circle formed and a purple light began to shine from it. In the next moment, I was surrounded by bug monsters. “You're going to die here. Did you *really* think I couldn't summon any more? I prepared a magic circle in advance for something like this.” She put her hand to her mouth and began to laugh. “How about this? If you put your weapon down, I'll spare you. Regardless, I won't let you get in my way.” She glared at me, and the bugs around her began to hiss as they approached me. So *gross*. “You don't *really* think you can win, do you?”

I clicked my tongue in annoyance and began to act as though I felt threatened. “I know when I'm outmatched. I'll surrender.”

“Good instincts. Now throw your weapon away.”

As instructed, I threw it. Right at her.

“Hey! Why'd you throw it *at* me?!”

“Sorry—my hand slipped.”

My long sword landed a little to the left of her. She glanced at it and then at me. “I commend you for your grace in defeat. However, now that you've seen me, I can't let you live. Sorry for deceiving you.” *Wow, that was short-lived.* “I'll make sure your death is painless.”

“So, just to be clear...you're breaking your promise?”

“I have something I must accomplish. I have no time to waste on you.”

“Okay, then I'm gonna break my promise too.”

“Huh?”

It was time to test out what I'd been wanting to try. I snapped my fingers and, in the next moment, the sword I'd thrown at her feet leapt up and sliced her feet clean off, making her fall to the ground. It had all happened so fast, she didn't even register it. Her face was frozen in confusion. I took advantage of that to tie up all the monsters with my strings, sealing their movements.

The reason I'd swung my sword earlier was to preserve the vector at which it'd been swung so that when I used Puppet Master later, it'd retain the kinetic energy carrying it in that specific direction. I'd applied what I'd learned from using my knives to the sword. *Also, I could've done all this without snapping my fingers, but I am nothing if not an entertainer.*

"Huh? Wh-What happened to my feet...? My feet!!!"

"Shut up. You're embarrassing yourself." I used Leap to jump in front of her and then stepped on her shoulder. "Both you and your monsters have been immobilized. I hope you know what checkmate is."

I looked at my gauntlet and switched out the spell in my Eye of Sigils. Then I tried hypnotizing her, but it didn't work. *Huh. Hypnosis has really been struggling recently.* I was starting to lose trust in it. Then I remembered what I'd read in her status, about a hypnosis contract or something. Maybe she was already hypnotized, so I couldn't also hypnotize her. Also, I was surprised that she hadn't given up yet.

"This isn't over! I still have so much left to do! For her sake... Those bastards..."

Even though she was being jammed into the ground by me, she still shot me a sharp glare. *Impressive, given you're missing your feet.* Or maybe her sense of pain was dulled due to being a demon sorcerer?

"Who do you mean by 'her'? What's your objective? You wanna get revenge on the church?"

She fell silent. I guess I was right. Her title of Avenger, paired with the encounter we'd had outside of the church and the words she'd said to Sister Sensei, made it pretty obvious that she had something against the church. There was definitely some kind of connection between the church, the town, and the Stampede.

"Let go of me! Don't get in my way! Don't try to stop me!"

"I'm not really interested in stopping you, but I *am* gonna get in your way. It's more convenient for me that way."

"You should prepare yourself..." *Looks like she's finally snapped.* She must've really wanted to take revenge if she was acting like this. *Hm, this is kinda fun.* "I can redirect that entire horde this way. I might die, but that won't stop their rampage. If you don't want that to happen, you'd better let me go now!"

Oh—I was wrong. She just hasn't given up on fighting me yet. She

must've thought that she still had the upper hand with all those bugs down there. In my opinion, she was naive to think that way. She was either blinded by rage or just really stupid. She should have just thrown in the towel.

I decided to test something out with my hypnosis. Previously, I'd theorized that it was easier to cast it on people with weakened mental states. I strung her up on the branches of a nearby tree.

"Wha— What are you doing?!" she shrieked.

She was really starting to *bug* me. *Ha*. I made sure that she could get a good look at the horde of monsters below.

"Fenrir, retreat immediately. Get as far away from them as possible."

"Oh... I was enjoying myself so muuuch. Yes, masterrr. I will obeeeey."

"Be sure to tell Ariya too."

Thanks to Will Convergence, a Skill that came bundled with Monarch Caliber, I could communicate with him and the other wolves telepathically, but not with Ariya, strangely enough.

I used Clairvoyance to make sure Ariya and Fenrir had gotten away. *Good*.

"Let's do it, Sylph."

"Wonder how this is going to turn out," Sylph said with a tinge of excitement in her voice.

"Wh-What are you doing?" the summoner asked, her voice trembling.

My lips curled into a smile. "I'm gonna show you true despair."

"Despair?"

"I'm gonna see if you really wanna take revenge or not. Do you know why rain doesn't hurt despite falling from so high in the sky?" I didn't wait for her response. "Air resistance. Thanks to that, it slows down a whole lot." I wasn't really sure she understood what I'd said, but all I needed was for her to vaguely grasp the concept. Not to mention, I was getting excited for the role-play I was about to do. "But my dark magic ignores air resistance. Do you know what that means? What do you think will happen if I drop something...say, a six-ton rock...from a thousand kilometers up in the air, without air resistance?"

A rock in free fall would accelerate due to the pull of gravity, and then when it landed...well, it wasn't exactly hard to do this calculation. It was something I'd learned in middle school science.

"If you assume that the acceleration caused by gravity is ten meters per second squared, it'd be traveling at about 4,472.1358 meters per second before it hits the ground. It'll be traveling at 16,100 kilometers per hour—roughly at Mach 13!"

I had no idea if she knew what “Mach” was, but at the very least, units of measurements were pretty much the same as they were on Earth. And thankfully, she seemed to understand what I was saying. She just looked confused as to why I was rambling on about numbers...but she was about to find out.

In the next moment, a large number of *things* began falling out of the sky at incredible speeds. I felt goosebumps. They were spindle-shaped boulders, each weighing about six tons. They made no sound in the dark of night and obliterated the monsters they made contact with. Everything that the rock shower fell upon was destroyed. Even the monsters with the toughest exoskeletons were blasted to smithereens. All that was left behind were bits and pieces, as well as a large number of craters.

“Ha ha... Ha ha ha ha ha ha!”



Before I'd realized it, I was laughing. I thought I lacked firepower, but this? *This* was something else. I'd barely had to lift a finger to destroy all of these monsters. It put even modern weapons to shame. I'd over-overkilled them.

What I'd done was extremely simple. I'd positioned Black Wind a thousand meters above the ground and dropped the rocks out of Shadow Storage. That's right—all I'd done was drop rocks on them. I'd adjusted their trajectories a little with Puppet Master, but that was pretty much all the effort I'd put into this attack. How was it that barely any effort from my side had yielded such destructive results? The only complaint I had was that it had taken a little over five minutes for the boulders to land. I'd had to start preparing for this attack in advance.

I could hear the sound of their impacts from all the way over here. It was so loud, I could feel the rumbling inside me. I was so happy I'd been able to use Conqueror on Sylph. Thanks to that, I'd gained Black Wind, an amazing ability.

"The momentum of each rock is actually 268,330,281,814.8 kilogram meters per second, the force of which is 30,000 tons. They're basically meteors."

Mental Math coming in clutch! It was amazing how the numbers I'd come up with so clearly conveyed the gravity of the situation. A wide grin spread across my face. I turned to the summoner. She was trembling, which was only natural after witnessing such a sight. Her eyes were trembling and her face was pale. I grabbed her by the hair and made her look closer.

"Look! Open your eyes and *really* get a good look. The bug army you were so proud of is in pieces."

"N-No..."

"Aw, don't cry. Just look. Isn't that amazing? Why are you trembling? What happened to your revenge? What happened to that kid you're working so hard for?"

"Nooooo!" she cried out. At that point, no other words came out of her mouth—only sounds. Maybe this was a good time to try hypnosis again. I could tell there was still resistance, but I pushed hard...and this time, I felt it succeed.

It seemed that the despair beat out her desire for revenge. Her crying stopped immediately as she fell under my hypnosis, leaving her face a teary, snotty mess. Her eyes had lost their fire and gone unfocused. *Perfect.* I'd proven my theory about mental strength increasing or decreasing the ease of putting someone under hypnosis. Tonight had been a fruitful day of many discoveries.

"Shouldn't you stop the attack?" Sylph asked. "There aren't any

monsters left.”

“Good point. Could you deploy Black Wind over there and recover the rocks and monster pieces?”

“You got it. I’m seriously impressed, you know. Their body parts really are everywhere. I wonder if Ariya and the others are okay.”

“Y-Yeah... Probably.” They’d gotten a good distance away, and since there was no air resistance, the boulders hadn’t exploded or anything. There might have been some waves of impact, but...they must’ve been fine, right? Ariya probably did something with magic. There weren’t any problems.

Sylph finished collecting everything while I was absorbed in my thoughts about the others. Most of the rocks had broken.

“Doesn’t look like I can use them again... Guess I can’t use them willy-nilly...ah...”

“Huh? Inori?!” For some reason, Sylph’s voice seemed distant.

Crap, my consciousness is fading. I felt my body make contact with something hard and flat. *Oh, this is the ground.* I could tell Sylph was shouting something, but I couldn’t make heads or tails of it. Was this Mana Depletion? Impossible. I’d barely used any.

Anyway, this didn’t feel like me losing consciousness, but something forcing my soul from my body. It was as if I were being spirited away, just like that time. I tried to fight the feeling but couldn’t. Could this possibly have been a god’s doing? *Shit, I didn’t expect them to come after me directly.* I bit my lip in frustration as I felt my consciousness slip away.

Level 15. Demon class changed from Baron-Class to Viscount-Class.

Baron-Class Authority Skill has changed to Viscount-Class Authority.

All Skills have been improved.

Inori Takafuji will now be transported to the space between worlds by the Goddess of Summoning.

Oh, this is your doing, you stupid goddess?

“Oh, you’re awake. It’s been a while— Hrmff!”

As soon as my eyes opened, I saw the goddess’s face, so I decided to punch her in the gut. After taking a good hit to the solar plexus, she hunched over and fell to her knees.

“I’m not afraid to hit a girl.”

“Wh-What was that for?! What did I ever do to you?!”

“You sicced that Justice-For-Show guy on me. Remember?” *Like hell am I gonna let you say you don’t remember.*

After a few seconds of racking her brain, she seemed to realize

what I was talking about. "Oh, wait. *That* guy? You're still mad about that?"

"Of course I am! I'm a man of my word." I said I was gonna give her a good smack, and now I had. I looked around. It was just as blank of a space as I remembered. "So what'd you bring me here for? Need something?"

"I brought you here not because I need something from you, but because I needed to do something for you." She began moving her fingers.

"Do something for me? Changing me from Baron-Class to Viscount-Class?"

"Right. You might not be in that world anymore, but I have to follow its rules for vampires. I also need to raise the level of some of your Skills. I have to make sure to manually do this."

Apparently, there were several rules that came with leveling up one's authority. One way to do it was to defeat several beings above your own authority. The other way was to defeat a being two authority classes above you. There were other rules, but either way, none of that should've mattered because the world I was in didn't have the same kinds of beings as the one where these rules would apply. It seemed the goddess was adjusting my stats to account for that.

Usually, raising my authority would have automatically raised the strength of my other cheat abilities, but in this case, the goddess had to call my soul here to do it directly.

"Is it really okay for you to go so out of your way to help me?"

"Well, I'm the one who tweaked all your abilities in the first place."

"You've really got a lot of time on your hands if you've been paying such close attention to me, huh?"

"No," she pouted. *She's just as cute as I remembered. I wanna poke her puffed-out cheeks.*

"It'd be great if you could adjust them to my specifications..."

"Sorry, no can do. Also, your Skills are going to evolve on their own, in ways that I can't predict either. However, maybe as a little bonus, I could alter one of your Skills a bit more."

Fantastic! "How much is 'a bit more'?"

"I could change the font of the Skill on your stat screen."

Wow, that really is a little bonus... "Anything more...useful?"

"What did you expect? I'm using my own authority via my Divine Blessing, not the summoning system."

I guess gods had their own circumstances to worry about. *Hm, then what about...* "Could you add, like, a notification or history log?"

"What?"

“When I was summoned here, I saw notifications about my Skills. I want something like that to pop up whenever I level up a Skill or gain a new one. If possible, I’d like to be able to toggle it on and off too.”

“Oh, I see. You’re thinking about this like one of your world’s games. Sure.” The goddess seemed to fidget around with something again, and then my body emitted a faint light.

“Here you go. Congratulations—you now have the Notification Skill.”

“Awesome.” For some reason, I couldn’t open my stats, so I guess I was just going to have to check later.

“We finished quicker than I expected. There’s still time left until you’re scheduled to be sent back.”

What should we do then? Shoot the shit? “Can I ask you something then?”

“What is it?”

“Can you tell me about the god or whatever higher being in the world I’m in?”

She grimaced. “Ah... Yeah, that’s been a problem in the celestial world too. Well, I can’t really go into detail.”

“Are there rules saying that gods can’t directly interfere with the mundane world?”

“Yeah, there are.”

“So in that case, wouldn’t the actions of my world’s god be considered interference?”

“Yeah...they *might* be going a little too far.”

“*Might* be?”

She looked like she had trouble finding the right words. “I shouldn’t really be telling you this, but that world absolutely refuses any interaction from other worlds. We’re restricted from interfering with other worlds ourselves, so we can’t exactly figure out what’s going on.” *Yeah, you really shouldn’t have told me that.* “Well, anyway...you should be fine,” she said, brushing off the issue.

I asked her a few more questions before I felt my consciousness begin to fade again.

“Looks like time’s up. Good luck.”

“Yeah, you got it,” I said, before returning to my body.

“Still not a word of thanks... That’s just like him. I kinda miss him, though.”



Something was falling, silently and at an incredible speed. Even with her enhanced vision, Ariya couldn’t make out what it was. However, she had a feeling that it was because of Inori, and had

something to do with all the huge rocks that they'd collected.

Upon impact, multiple shock waves sent everything in the area flying. Ariya instinctively knew that she was in danger, so she immediately used defensive magic, while Fenrir and the wolves hid inside the shadows. She'd been confident that there was enough distance between her and Inori's attack, but even so, her defensive magic barely held up against the shock waves. It just showed how powerful of an attack he'd unleashed.

The gigantic bugs that had filled the area had been completely demolished. It was as if they'd been stepped on and smooshed. Their appendages had been torn apart, their exoskeletons ripped to shreds, and their blood had spurted into the sky.

When things had finally quieted down, Ariya dispelled her defensive magic and observed the scene in front of her. There wasn't any sign of grass on the once-green field. It was as if the entire area had been turned upside down, littered with bits and pieces of the bugs.

It was the scene of a disaster. Before Ariya even realized it, she'd fallen, trembling, to her knees. She couldn't find the strength to stand up.

"Thiss... This is the power of our masterrr?" Fenrir asked, emerging from the shadows. Though no enemies remained, his fur was standing on edge. He was clearly guarded, but unlike Ariya, he was still able to stand.

It wasn't entirely due to fear that she'd gone weak, though. She remembered the events that had happened in the Rising Sun Kingdom: protecting Inori, being cut down, Inori killing all the knights, and then him drinking her blood. When she had next awoken, her home had been burned to cinders, and Inori had killed everyone involved in the castle, whether or not they'd been involved in the coup. He'd even slain the warrior known as humanity's strongest.

Her brain had accepted his claims, but her heart had refused to do the same. After all, how could someone who seemed as harmless as Inori possess such great power? It was hard for her to believe that he'd truly been solely responsible for the destruction of the Rising Sun Kingdom.

Perhaps if she'd witnessed the events of that night, she wouldn't have held these doubts in her heart. Perhaps, if she'd known his strength firsthand, she would never have declared that she'd one day surpass him.

The scene that lay before her eyes had turned that entire notion on its head. He hadn't been lying or exaggerating. He really did possess the power to take down the entire castle. But even so, his opponents back then had been mere humans, not monsters. What he

had been capable of back then was nothing compared to the destruction he was capable of enacting now.

For the first time since they had met, Ariya was afraid of Inori. Her legs were weak and trembled, making it impossible for her to stand. The blinders had come off. She was now fully aware of how high the wall which separated them was. Her heart sank. She hadn't necessarily given up, but she was no longer clueless as to how difficult of a feat it'd be—it seemed to border on the impossible.

And then another feeling began to surface inside of her—it was excitement. Witnessing this almost cataclysmic event elicited admiration for Inori within Ariya, which confused her. A voice called out to her from inside her mind: *You, of all people, should know why you feel this way.*

Shut up, Ariya spat at the voice in her head. *I'm not like him.* But at the same time, Ariya knew that that inner voice was right on the money.

In the next moment, a black haze descended upon the field. Black Wind was connected to Inori's Shadow Storage, so most likely what he was doing now was collecting the bits and pieces of the bugs. This theory of hers was proven correct when Black Wind dissipated and there wasn't a trace of any of the bugs left. All that remained were countless craters.

"Hm?" Ariya was snapped out of her daze by Fenrir, who seemed to have sensed something. "Thiss..."

"What's the matter?" Ariya asked.

"My connection with our master has been severrrred," Fenrir said, frowning.

"That's strange."

"Could something have happened to himmm?"

Suddenly, all the feelings she'd been carrying for Inori turned to concern. Even if he was incredibly difficult to kill, it wasn't impossible. Fenrir must have been thinking the same thing because he had become obviously restless. They wanted to run to Inori, but they weren't sure where he was.

"Ariya." A spirit clad in black flew towards them.

"Sylph! Do you know where Inori is?"

"He's up on that cliff. He collapsed all of a sudden."

Ariya and Fenrir immediately followed Sylph to the cliff, and just as she'd said, Inori was unconscious on the ground. There was also a girl who was tied up and unconscious.

"Inori?! Wake up!" Ariya said, giving his head a shake. "Ah, hang on—if this is a concussion, I should be more careful with his head. What was I supposed to do in this situation again? Uh...make sure his airways are clear and then roll him onto his side." Ariya muttered in a

panic, trying to draw on all the knowledge she'd gained about first aid.

"Calm down," Sylph called out. "He's not hurt. He's perfectly healthy."

"Then why's he unconscious?!"

"I...I don't know." In the meantime, Sylph had been trying to figure out why she couldn't sense Inori's soul inside his body. *I can tell that his body's fine. If anything, it feels like his body has been put in stasis or something.* If his body had been put in stasis, though, then it shouldn't have been possible for Inori to die. Sylph decided not to share the fact that his soul wasn't in his body with Ariya and Fenrir as it would only make them freak out. The only thing they could do was patiently wait.

"Wh-What should we do?"

"Physically, he's fine. We just need to wait for him to wake up. Why don't you let him use your lap as a pillow or something?"

"Wh-What?!" The relief Ariya felt when Sylph said Inori would be okay instantly turned to surprise at Sylph's suggestion, and she froze.

"Why are you freaking out? There's nothing weird about lap pillows."

"T-True..." And so Ariya nervously rested Inori's head on her lap. "This is merely a first aid treatment for his recovery. I derive no enjoyment from this whatsoever..." she murmured.



“We can hear you,” Sylph said.

“Eek!”

Fenrir spoke up. “We will secure the perimeterrr.” He led the other wolves to the forest, leaving Ariya, bright red, with Inori’s head on her lap.

Somehow, the expression he wore at the moment was different than how he usually looked when he slept. It was much calmer, much more peaceful. Ariya stroked his head while gazing upon his adorable, childlike face. *I’ve been by his side ever since I left home*, she thought.

Inori was an unknown entity to her. She couldn’t understand his thought process at all. He was also someone that she needed to surpass. But more than anything, she was realizing now just how important he was to her. *As much as I don’t want to admit it...I may be in love with you.*

“Wait...” Sylph said, as if she’d had an epiphany. “Maybe this is my chance to run away.”

“Huh?! Are you crazy?!” Ariya exclaimed.



The first thing I noticed when I opened my eyes was Sylph suggesting that she could run away.

“Oh, no, you don’t.”

I grabbed her just as she was about to fly away.

“Oof!”

“You ready for your punishment?” I asked, straightening a finger so I could point it at her chest.

“Wait. No, don’t!” she pleaded.

As I began dexterously flicking the protrusions on her chest, I looked around to try to figure out what had happened. I’d lost consciousness, and my head was currently being supported by something soft. Looking up, I saw Ariya’s head not too far from my own.

“Please don’t read too much into this. I was merely performing first aid...” Ariya said, her cheeks tinged with pink.

As much as I wanted to ask how resting on her lap had anything to do with first aid, I decided to stay quiet and instead enjoy the sensation of my head on her thighs.

“Thanks. Let me stay like this a little longer.”

“Um, okay.”

“Inori, your body was pretty much suspended in time, so there shouldn’t be any damage that would require you to keep—” I used Sexual Prowess again to shut Sylph up so she wouldn’t say anything unnecessary.

Anyway, since things had calmed down, I could take the time to look at my notifications log and find out what had changed with my stats.

Notifications

Demon Rank change complete. Skills and abilities have been adjusted and improved accordingly.

Growth Boost: Effect has been doubled.

5x Exp Multiplier: Changed to 10x Exp Multiplier.

½ Required Exp: Changed to ¼ Required Exp.

Eye of True Sight: Omniscience range has been increased.

Eye of Sigils: Required MP cost reduced by half.

Contempt for the Sun God: Stat decrease reduced to ⅓.

Vampirism: Speed of draining blood increased.

Baron-Class Authority: Changed to Viscount-Class Authority.

Skill Pilfer: Guaranteed to pilfer two Skills.

True Dark Magic: Conqueror speed increased.

Armament Craft: Atomic Manipulation ability added.

Detect: Effective range increased.

Level Up: Effect doubled.

Skill Acquisition: Effect doubled.

Monarch Caliber: Stats of underlings increased.

Martial Arts: Ability to accumulate experience points and self-develop techniques added.

Swordsmanship: Level increased.

Stealth: Level increased.

Throwing Arts: Level increased.

Dagger Arts: Level increased.

And on and on it went. In general, all the levels of my Skills had increased. I wanted to take my time and go through my Skills one by one, with commentary, so I went to open my stats, but just as I did, Detect picked up on something.

Whatever it was, it was really strong, and it had appeared in close proximity to us. It was as if it had teleported directly here. This wasn't the time to be lying around. I jumped to my feet and assumed a battle stance. Ariya immediately followed suit. She had good instincts and was quick to follow up. Sylph was still squirming around in my hand. She was kinda in the way, so I just tossed her aside.

"Ahhh!" She let out a scream as she tumbled away, but I chose to ignore her and focus on the approaching threat.

“Who’s there?” I called out.

“It’s me,” said a figure, emerging from the shadows. I recognized the voice. *Oh, it’s my drinking buddy.* “Looks like you’re having a grand old time.”

The demon king Ighnoa had appeared before us. It probably should have come as more of a surprise that he could teleport, but then again, he had insane stats.

“Do you know him?” Ariya asked nervously.

“You mind filling her in?” I asked him.

I’d kept his identity a secret from Ariya so that she wouldn’t act strangely and tip him off to the fact that I knew who he was.

“I’m the previous-previous demon king, and also now the current demon king, Ighnoa. Nice to meet you.”

“Uh... I’m Ariya. Nice to meet you?” Her confusion made it clear she didn’t really understand who he was.

“You gotta explain better than that,” I told Ighnoa.

“I’m not sure how I could’ve been any clearer.”

“By demon king...you mean *the* demon king?” Ariya asked.

“Okay, look, I’ll explain later.” I judged that it’d be better to take the time to explain things later, because it looked like she really wasn’t getting it, and I had some questions for Ighnoa. “Something you need?”

“Nah. I just heard all this noise and wanted to check it out. Sounded like fun.”

“So basically, you’re here to rubberneck.”

“Yeah, pretty much. Oh, I guess I *did* have one other reason. I wanted to find out what you’re gonna do about all that.” He pointed down at the craters. “I could hear that all the way from town. It’s only a matter of time before someone comes to check things out. Half the people thought it was just thunder, though.”

We were a pretty good distance away from town, but it seemed they could still hear the rumblings of what had gone down here. I guess I hadn’t really known how strong this attack was going to be in the first place, but I certainly hadn’t expected it to have been *this* strong. If I had, maybe I would’ve come up with a plan for what to do next.

“Would anyone really come all the way out here in the middle of the night?” I asked. “I doubt any investigation requests would arrive at the guild before tomorrow at the earliest. That should give us enough time to maybe have everything cleaned up by the day after next.”

“Sure, that logic checks out—if you’re only thinking about the guild. The church, however, is already putting together a team to come out here.”

"Hm... The church, huh?"

"Yeah. It's almost as if they knew what was happening tonight."

"Interesting." *The church again? Something's definitely fishy.* "Yeah, this is certainly a problem."

"You don't wanna leave any evidence, right?"

"I don't."

"Well, that's why I'm here. I can fix this place up in no time with magic."

I had no doubt *he* could. I might've been able to cover up the craters using Armament Craft, but I'd essentially just be creating a field of pitfalls. It'd make things even more suspicious.

"You okay helping out?" I asked.

"Yeah. I'll hardly break a sweat."

"Okay then. Go ahead."

"Sure thing. You should head back to town."

I was surprised by his consideration, although I guess it was better for him if I was able to move around freely without the church watching my every move because they suspected me of something.

"You two seem very friendly," Ariya pointed out.

"You think so?" I asked.

"From where I'm standing, you two are a lot closer. Are you two an item?" Ighnoa asked Ariya.

"A-An item?!" Ariya froze.

"Nah," I answered in her stead.

"Technically, I serve him."

"You...serve him? Really?" Ighnoa was genuinely surprised by this. *What's there to be surprised about?*

I scooped up Sylph, who'd been lying on the ground, and put her in my pocket. "We're gonna head back then," I said, waving my hand at him.

"Ah, wait a minute. Could you leave her here?" He indicated Ariya.

"Huh?" *Is he interested in her or something? Seriously? Depending on your intentions, we might become enemies.* "She's mine. Hands off."

"Don't give me that look. I'm not trying to do anything funny with her—I just have a few questions."

A few questions? But why Ariya? I looked at Ariya, who'd turned red when I'd said that she was mine. She'd been acting like a lovestruck maiden or something this entire time.

"I swear, I won't do anything. I'm not lookin' to start something with you. You know that, right?"

"Yeah... Okay, bring her back to me in one piece then. Also, be sure to properly introduce yourself."

With that, I left Ariya, who was still confused, and returned to

town. I knew he wasn't the type to lie. If he'd really wanted Ariya, he could've taken her whenever he wanted. Leaving her with him shouldn't have been a problem.

As much as I wanted to simply teleport back to town, I couldn't with Sylph in my pocket, which meant I had to run back. Maybe I'd wake her up when we got to the gates and have her turn us invisible, at least. *Ugh, what a pain.*



Ariya watched as Inori left, his words ringing in her head. She couldn't deny that hearing such a blatant declaration that she belonged to him had shaken her. Still, she couldn't cast a certain doubt from her mind—that there was a fundamental difference between them.

She couldn't quite put her finger on how, but she instinctively knew it to be true. And no matter how she tried, she couldn't shake off those doubts. She had been looking away from this truth this entire time. But now that she'd been forced to see it, it made her feel a chill down her spine. It was almost as if something in her had broken.

"Sorry—could you wait here for a bit?"

"Oh, okay," Ariya said, replying to the man behind her.

She still had absolutely no clue who he was. He had the features of a dwarf, elf, beastkin, dragonewt, human, and demon. No doubt he would stand out anywhere he went. There was also an unsettling atmosphere about him. In the next moment, however, Ariya's opinion of him would be turned on its head.

"Okay," he said in a leisurely fashion.

Suddenly the ground began to shake. Ighnoa raised his hand and the field below them shifted. The craters started filling up with dirt, as if time itself had been reversed within them. This effect occurred over a very large area and required very precise control. It wasn't something that a human was capable of, and it probably wasn't something that a demon king could easily do either.

"It's gonna take a bit," he said, gesturing at the field as it repaired itself, without turning to face Ariya.

In the meantime, he gave Ariya a rough rundown of what he'd told Inori the other day. Though Ariya was entranced by the sight of the ground fixing itself, she was still able to catch everything he said. She understood that he was the previous-previous demon king—Ighnoa, that symbol of despair.

It was hard to believe that that individual was standing right in front of her, especially after everything that she'd been taught growing up. But what choice did she have, with him standing before her, easily performing magic that should have been impossible for just

about anybody except Ighnoa himself? He was the only person in history who could have had this level of precise magic control.

By the time he finished his explanation, he'd also filled in all the craters. Now, he was using magic to regrow the grass. By this point, it was hard to believe that not too long ago, this place had been a war zone. It was a testament to Inori's power that he'd been able to cause so much destruction, but on the flip side, the fact that Ighnoa had been able to restore everything to perfection was an even greater display of strength.

"Your name's Ariya, right?" Ighnoa asked suddenly. "Do you really serve him?"

Caught off guard, Ariya jumped a little. "Yes, I do."

"What does that entail, exactly?"

"I suppose I'm not too different from a slave."

"And how'd *that* happen?" he asked.

She wasn't sure how much she ought to reveal, so she took a minute to carefully select her words. From what she could discern about the relationship between Ighnoa and Inori, and judging by the words they'd exchanged, they were on good terms but also wary of each other. Ariya thus decided that she'd hold off on revealing anything about Inori's skills or his personality. She couldn't let a word slip about that or his race.

"In exchange for saving my life, I vowed to serve him."

"Keeping your cards close to your chest, huh?" Ighnoa nodded.

"Well, that's fine."

Internally, Ariya sighed with relief. Judging from the level of magic Ighnoa had displayed, Ariya was sure that Inori stood no chance against him. She knew that she had to continue to protect as much information about Inori as possible during this conversation.

"Surprised that he's so attached to you," Ighnoa went on. "He must be really into you."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, given his personality, you'd be hard-pressed to find someone he's willing to cooperate with. The fact that he's working so closely with you shows that he has a soft spot for you."

Ariya still didn't really grasp what Ighnoa meant. Sure, Inori may have had fun with her body, but she couldn't recall a time that he had genuinely lusted for her, nor a time when he had been kind to her.

"What exactly am I doing here?" she asked.

"I was just curious about you, since you're always around him. And after hearing what you had to say, I'm even more interested." Ighnoa sat down and gestured for Ariya to come over.

After years of being trained in etiquette, Ariya hesitated to sit directly on the ground, but she ultimately decided to sit cross-legged.

“When I said he has a soft spot for you, I didn’t necessarily mean in a sexual way. That might be normal for most people, but he’s not normal.”

“That’s true.” Ariya herself had always sensed that Inori was different from others.

“By ‘not normal,’ I’m not talking about his strength or abilities. Now, I don’t know what powers he possesses, but to me, the most frightening things about him are his soul, his mental fortitude, and the way he thinks.”

Ariya knew what Ighnoa was talking about. Inori wasn’t truly cold-blooded, nor was he emotional. There was something about him that was different from most people. He was twisted. One could tell just by looking at him.

“I doubt he’s become who he is because of something from his past. He was probably born like this. Some might label him a psychopath, but honestly, he’s different from your average psychopath as well.”

“What about him are you referring to, exactly?”

“You want me to be specific? Hm...” Ighnoa took a moment before responding. “He enjoys being perceived as an enemy.”

“You mean he’s addicted to fighting?”

“Yes and no.” Ariya tilted her head in confusion at Ighnoa’s response. “Hm, how about this? Imagine there’s a guy and a girl who are in love. The guy is strong-willed, principled, and skilled. A principled person would challenge him to a fair fight. Meanwhile, someone addicted to fighting would kidnap the woman he loved to get the guy to fight him for real. And a sadistic guy would torture the girl in front of the guy before killing her. But Inori wouldn’t do any of that. He’d probably take the girl hostage, get the guy to fight him for real, and as soon as the guy perceived him as an enemy, he’d kill the girl, sending the guy into despair before killing him...and all without batting an eye.”

“Huh...?”

“Yeah. I know it sounds weird, but that’s my point. He’s someone who really likes making enemies of people. He’ll do anything to accomplish that.” Ighnoa grimaced.

Ariya looked at him doubtfully. “So what does this have to do with me?”

“Right. He has an extreme view of the world, where everything is divided into three categories: himself, enemies, and things.” He held up three fingers.

“Huh?” Ariya wasn’t confused by his words; rather, she was curious as to where she fell within those three categories.

As if to answer her question, Ighnoa went on. “You’re a thing to

him. He doesn't see you as anything but his possession."

"His...possession?"

When Inori had declared to Ighnoa that Ariya was his, he hadn't meant it in a romantic sense, but in a possessive one. Suddenly, it was as if cracks were forming in Ariya's head. The days that they'd spent together, the fun that they'd had—it all felt like a lie.

"But I guess that the category of 'thing' can itself be divided into two categories: obstacles, and possessions." Ariya had fallen silent, but still Ighnoa continued. "You can probably guess by now that no matter who he's with, he has an abnormal classification of them in his mind. He'd never work with anyone not under his control. I doubt he'd work with anyone, even if he considered them his possession." Ighnoa looked directly at Ariya, as if he was seeing straight into her soul. "The reason he has a soft spot for you is most likely because he feels that the two of you are similar. That's why he allows you to be with him so much. If I had to guess..."

Ariya was no longer really able to follow what Ighnoa was saying. The sounds entered her ears, but none of them took. However, his next words felt as if they cleared her mind, going straight into her heart.

"You're just as messed up as he is, in some regard."

"I...am?"

"I can't think of any other reason why he'd like you so much. From what I can tell, you seem normal enough...but after all the time you've spent together, you can tell that you're not normal yourself, right?"

It was as if she was being forced to swallow some kind of hard truth. She didn't want to admit it. She didn't want to face the truth. It was said that the more bitter the medicine, the more effective it was, but this felt like poison to Ariya.

"Why do you claim to know so much about him...? You haven't even spent that much time with him."

"I think I know him better than someone like you, who refuses to look at him for who he is," Ighnoa immediately responded. "I'm not trying to make you depressed or anything. I'm just trying to warn you before it's too late. When I say you're 'twisted,' I mean by normal standards. And it's not necessarily a bad thing. Inori is missing some crucial parts as a human, but as a living thing in general, he's close to perfection."



Oh, in case you were wondering—yes, I had forgotten all about the summoner whom I'd left hanging on the tree branches. Luckily, I remembered before I'd managed to run all the way back to town, so I

went back to get her.

“Huh?” Ighnoa said. “You’re back.”

“Yeah, forgot something. Sorry to interrupt.”

“Not to worry. We’ve finished our chat.”

I looked down to see that the plains had been returned to their previous state. He really was on a whole different level.

“If you’re done, I’ll take Ariya back.”

“Sure thing.”

For some reason, Ariya froze up. Shadows fell across her face.

“Hey—what’d you do to Ariya?”

“All we did was talk.”

Appraisal confirmed he wasn’t lying. I couldn’t find any afflictions or damage, which meant it was probably their conversation that was making her act like this. I’d just have to ask her later.

I took the woman down from the tree and put her over my shoulder. “Let’s go, Ariya.”

“Um...” Ariya seemed nervous. “I actually have a job request that requires me to be out tonight. I’ll be fine on my own. You should return by yourself.”

“Hm.” She had a point. It would’ve been weird for her to go back when she was technically on the job. On the other hand, I was supposed to have still been in the town, so I needed to return. I knew that this made sense...but something didn’t sit right with me. “You’re kinda making it sound like you want to be by yourself.”

Ariya jumped slightly. Did she still have things she wanted to discuss with Ighnoa? I looked at him, but he shook his head as if he knew what I wanted to ask. Apparently, they were done talking. I looked back to Ariya. She really seemed to be in a bad mood. It was as if she was uneasy about something, and her expression looked as though she was thinking hard. For the sake of her mental health, I figured it probably wasn’t best for me to force her to come back with me.

“Okay. Do what you want tonight. We’ll meet back up tomorrow.”

“Okay...” Ariya nodded. She seemed somewhat relieved.

As we made our way back to town, I asked the summoner a few questions. I learned more about her motives, what sorcerers and demons had to do with one another, and the background of the perpetrators and the suspects. By then, I more or less understood what’d been going on. I also searched through her clothes and found a certain magic tool.

“This must be it.”

It was a sort of jamming magic tool that could block any kind of powers like my Detect. Apparently, it was pretty rare. I might not

have been able to sense it, but Sylph had apparently been aware of it. It seemed really useful, so I decided to keep it for myself. As for the summoner, she seemed like she'd be useful too, so I wanted to keep her somewhere where she wouldn't be found. There weren't any places like that in the city, so I decided to find a tree that'd serve as a landmark.

"That should work," I said, having found a tree that had a unique-looking cavity in it. I was sure to remember the way there with Photographic Memory as well, to eliminate the possibility of getting lost. Next, I made a basement beneath the tree with Armament Craft. I knew that Skill had gained a new ability, but I hadn't had the chance to test it out yet.

After creating the basement, I was sure to leave her a day's worth of food and water. I had no worries about her running away since she was under my hypnosis. Maybe I was going a little beyond just violating human rights here...but you know what they say: it's not a crime if you don't get caught.



Chris had a little sister. The two of them had been raised in an orphanage next to the church. More than likely, not having parents had influenced their personalities as they'd aged. Still, though, they grew up in a peaceful environment without incident.

But one day, Chris discovered that she had an affinity for dark magic—an affinity that was strongly affiliated with demons. Other humans would ostracize anyone who had such an affinity, and Chris was no exception to that rule. From that day on, she was closely observed. Fortunately, her little sister did not develop a similar affinity for dark magic, and so she was still able to live a happy life.

One day, a man who called himself a "Holy Knight" appeared before Chris, who was at that time still a young girl. At first, he tried to subdue her with violence. She had no idea what was going on, but she knew how much his fists hurt each time they came into contact with her body. Her bones cracked and her skin bruised.

Then, he gave Chris an order. If she refused him, he'd hit her again. And because she did refuse, she continued to be the subject of his violence. After a while, it stopped hurting. Infuriated, the man moved on and tried to violate her sexually. Still, Chris refused him.

She didn't have a particular reason to say no to his request. Rather, it was simply that she no longer had the will to say yes. She had nothing left. She couldn't bring herself to care about orders, or anything else.

Soon enough, her sense of pain faded, and so did her senses of touch, taste, and smell. All she had left was her hearing. When the

man came again on another day, everything was pretty much the same as always. However, this time, he wore an unsettling smile on his face.

“Don’t you care about what will happen to your little sister?” he asked, ruthlessly.

Light returned to Chris’s eyes as she began remembering her little sister. That girl was the last source of her happiness.

Because of this, Chris ended up accepting the man’s order, and began to learn the fundamentals of dark magic. In the beginning, she was beaten whenever she messed up, but since violence didn’t seem to have too much of an effect on her anymore, he “motivated” her with talk of her sister. That made her work as hard as if her life had depended on it.

Thus, Chris was raised to be a summoner. She was then instructed to summon a large horde of monsters when she was told. In other words, she was made to cause the Stampede. And after she did, she’d return to the town and watch as that man was revered as a hero for defending the town.

After that, the church took her in to control her more closely. She realized that the man’s actions had been approved by the church, but she didn’t care about that. After finding out that the church had been keeping close tabs on her sister as well, however, she flew into a fit of rage.

The church then promised Chris that her little sister would be protected so long as she summoned the Stampede every three years. Though essentially a hostage, her little sister was able to live in peace because of Chris’s sacrifice.

The church took Chris away from her sister, and limited contact between the two of them. They weren’t even allowed to see each other. The most they were allowed to do was exchange letters. This correspondence was a light in the swirling pit of darkness that was Chris’s life. Her little sister was a magic prodigy and had been scouted by the Holy Knights...or at least, that was what Chris was told, and what she wanted to believe. All she wanted was for her sister to live a peaceful life.

But just a few days ago, she’d been informed that her sister had died two months prior. She couldn’t understand. All this time, she’d believed that her sister had been taken care of and safe despite her frail constitution. In reality, however, she’d been enduring abuse as the little sister of a filthy user of dark magic. All the letters she’d been exchanging with her sister had actually been written by the church...but they had only been able to keep the act up for so long.

Chris pressed the man who’d forced her into all of this, but he didn’t show the least bit of remorse. If anything, he seemed proud. He

even boasted about how her little sister had been the plaything of the church.

At that moment, something inside of Chris changed. Within the emptiness inside her, a black fire began to burn. She wanted them to pay for what they'd done. She wanted revenge. This rage consumed her.

She had finally realized how despicable the church was—that it was a cesspool—and how tragic of a life she'd been living. She knew that her rage was consuming her, but it didn't matter. The only option left to her was revenge. But she didn't have any real ways to exact it. In the past ten years, the church had only grown stronger. There wasn't anything she could do by herself, and there was no chance she could find allies to help her. Besides, she'd never once relied on anyone, so that thought hadn't even occurred to her in the first place.

But just then, a sweet whisper from a demon named Neon caressed her ears. "You're a summoner just like me... Isn't that nice?"

In exchange for serving the demon king, the demon had granted her great power as a demon sorcerer. To become a demon sorcerer, summoners like her needed to form hypnosis contracts with demons. And all of this, everything she did, was for the sake of her revenge against the church.

But after her swarm of bugs had been defeated, the fires of her revenge were easily snuffed out. She feared this power, one that surpassed the church and even the power of the demons themselves.

Chris opened her eyes to find herself tied up in a tight, dark space. It felt so familiar. She didn't feel startled by this at all. Strangely, only her legs were tied. She could move her arms and hands freely. Even so, she had a feeling she wouldn't be able to untie whatever bound her legs. She wanted to laugh at how comfortable she felt in this situation.

There was a plate on the ground with food on it, almost like something that had been left for a pet. As degrading as this felt, it was still better than how she'd been treated at the orphanage. At the very least, the food she'd been provided with seemed to have some semblance to what humans normally ate. Chris wasn't feeling hungry, though, so she instead elected to stare off into space.

As she did, memories of what had happened slowly began coming back to her. A young man had appeared in front of her and hypnotized her. She also faintly remembered him asking about her past. It had been as though she'd swallowed truth serum—she couldn't help but answer truthfully.

"You're not gonna try to escape?" Chris heard a sudden voice from the corner of the room, making her jump a little.

She knew this voice as the one that belonged to the guy who'd

sown the seeds of despair within her. Fear spread across her body. She couldn't even bring herself to respond.

At this, Inori snapped his fingers. Chris didn't initially understand why he'd done this, but she felt her fear dissipating, to the point where she felt relaxed enough to talk.

"Even if I escaped...what would I do?"

"Take revenge? Or are you done with that?"

"It's strange. My head was filled with thoughts of revenge, but not anymore. I still loathe the church, but I just don't have the will to do it any longer."

Inori scratched his head. "Really? That's some weak-ass revenge, then."

"It is. Now, with even that revenge gone, I'm empty. I won't ever hear my little sister's voice again. Even her face has become hazy. All this time, I thought the revenge inside me was a fiery blaze, but now I realize it was just kindling that I was desperately trying to keep alive."

"You know I'm gonna kill you, right?" said Inori. "I don't see the point in keeping you alive. I'm gonna get what I can out of you and then get rid of you. No objections?"

"Now that fear rules me, I don't have any desire to live or to exact revenge. I've given up." She sounded very much at peace.

Inori exhaled in disappointment. "Such a waste. I've lost interest in you. I even tried looking into your past to stoke the flames more, but it looks like that was all for nothing."

"Sorry I couldn't live up to your expectations. Could I ask you to hypnotize me again? I don't want to think about anything anymore."

"I was already planning to." Inori slowly stood and looked at his gauntlet. His left eye glowed. She knew what was coming.

"Actually...could you wait a little?"

"What now? You're really good at changing your mind, aren't you?" Inori said sarcastically.

"You said you were going to use me, right? Will it have anything to do with the church?"

"Yeah."

Hearing this, Chris began to laugh. "Could you use me to kill every last one of them? I don't care if I'm mentally present for it or not. I'd probably be more useful to you that way, right?"

"Again, I was already planning to. What? Do you have other demands?"

"No—that's perfect. I'm sure my past self would have been happy with that as well." She smiled, as if relieved.

"Who cares about your past self?" Inori scoffed. "You're the one alive right now, so what does your past self matter?"

"I'm sure it doesn't make any sense to you, but it means a lot to

me. I've lived a very short, insignificant life, but it feels like it was all worth it, just for this one thing."

Inori looked into her eyes. "Don't worry... I'm gonna use you to kill them all."

"Thank you... I can finally say goodbye to this shitty life."

And with that, Inori activated his Eye of Sigils.

Idle Talk

My face felt warm. The chirping of birds seemed so far away. *Oh, it's morning already?* As of today, it had been five days since my failed summoning attempt. As soon as I'd exceeded the limits of my revitalization magic, my body had aged instantly. I could no longer see. I could no longer even lift a finger. I hadn't had anything to eat since yesterday.

Perhaps this was what it was like to die alone. I suspected that this day would be the last time I'd feel the sun's warmth. My blanket felt so heavy on me, it was almost painful. I was now sincerely regretting never having taken on a disciple or hired an assistant. It would have been nice, but it was far too late for that now.

I began thinking back to that otherworlder that I'd summoned. Wouldn't it have been nice if I'd been able to spend the last few days of my life instilling him with every last piece of my knowledge, my experience, and my will?

I'd yearned for that kind of quiet, peaceful life, even if I knew it was pathetic to have done so. That was all in the past. The summoning had failed, and there was nothing I could do about it anymore. Thinking about what could've been only put me in more agony. It was better to empty my mind.

My long life was coming to an end. I'd devoted everything I had to my research for the sake of humanity, and at the end of it, I'd finally had a breakthrough. Tragically, I couldn't pass this knowledge on before I died. It made me wonder what the point of my life had been. I'd spent most of my life doing research in a remote cabin. Had I even lived?

I'd dropped out of the magic academy partway through to focus solely on my research. I didn't interact with any family members. I never met up with friends. I kept to myself, all because I believed that relationships in any form were simply a waste of time. Thus, I'd never taken it upon myself to find a husband or a boyfriend. I had never become romantically involved with anyone—I'd never even held the hands of a significant other. Of course, I'd never had children either or engaged in any sexual activities.

Having never really spent time with my family nor had a family of my own made me feel as if I'd never really lived. I had been so single-mindedly focused on my goal of saving others that I never even

considered saving myself.

I could feel hunger and thirst gripping my body. My life was nearing its end. If only I'd never attempted that summoning, I might have been able to live another month or so. Maybe in that time, I could've found myself a companion. Then again, thanks to the negative stigma of being a witch and how I lived so far from society, there was little to no chance of that.

Maybe if people didn't hate dark magic so much, I could have led an enjoyable life alongside other researchers, all of us with the same goal. But I doubt I would've been able to get as far as I had. I'd only been motivated to push myself like this *because* people hated dark magic. *Heh, wow. My life really has been pointless.* If my life had no meaning, then I supposed I should be happy to throw it away and eagerly await my next one. *An old hag like me should just die already.*

"I want to live..."

"Oh, wow, you're still just barely hanging in there."

Am I dead? Am I dreaming? I didn't know anyone, especially not a man, who would travel all the way out here to visit me. I couldn't see what he looked like, but I knew that he was standing in the doorway of my hut.

"Hm? Are you actually alive? Looks like you are... Just barely, though. Ugh, I'll yell at *her* later. Anyway, do your ears still work?"

"Yes... Who are you?" I asked in a raspy voice.

"A certain person told me to come here. Your name is Shina, right? How's it feel to have lived your entire life and accomplished nothing whatsoever?"

"Not very kind, are you? Did you come all the way here to mock a dying woman?"

"Nope, not at all. I wanna know how strong your will is. Any regrets?" *Regrets? Of course! Regrets are all I have!* "Let me simplify the question, actually. Do you wanna die? Or do you wanna keep clinging to life?"

"What do you mean? You make it sound as if..."

"I can keep you alive? Yeah, of course I can. I wouldn't waste my time coming all the way out here if I couldn't. But here's the thing—there are a few requirements you have to meet."

"Requirements?"

"Yep. This ain't charity. First, I need to confirm something." He exhaled before continuing. "Are you a virgin?"

What kind of question is that? "Is that really something to ask an old lady like myself? However...as ashamed as I am, the answer is yes."

"Okay, then second—are you willing to discard your dignity as a human and serve me for the rest of your life?"

“Serve...you?”

“In other words, you’ll be my slave. You won’t be able to live as a human anymore. Whatever regrets you have, you may never be able to resolve them.”

Slave? Virgin? I had a feeling I knew what he was getting at. “Do you intend to make me your sex slave? Will having intercourse with an old lady like me be enjoyable for you?”

“No, see—when I save you, you’ll become young again. You’ll be semipermanently young.”

“In other words, you plan to semipermanently have intercourse with me?”

“Well, you’re free to interpret my words however you’d like.”

I see. So my choices are either to die and go to hell, or to stay alive in a living hell. “Why save me? Just for the sex? I don’t think I’m that attractive.”

“Don’t sell yourself short. You’re plenty beautiful...but that’s not the point. This is my way of thanking you.”

“Thanking me?”

“Yeah—your dark magic has really helped me and others. It’s gonna keep helping people too...maybe the entire world,” he explained. “Anyway, there’s not much time left. Mind making a decision?”

I could either die now, or continue living and have my dignity as a woman constantly violated. Sure, the latter frightened me...but more than anything, I was still confused as to why I was taking him seriously. I hadn’t done anything that he should thank me for. I didn’t even know what he looked like. Even if he saved my life, I couldn’t stomach the thought of potentially having sexual relations with a sweaty, portly, middle-aged man. But even so...

“I want to live. Tell me what I need to do.”

He cackled. “Even after a life of failures, and knowing that you may never be able to rectify your mistakes or resolve your regrets, you choose to cling to life. Very good.” He seemed to be enjoying himself.

“Of course. Dying means the end of things. But if I live, there’s still a chance. I will spread dark magic across this world no matter what, even if it means selling my soul to a demon like you.”

“Demon? Me? That’s harsh.”

“Keeping an old human like myself alive isn’t something a human would do.”

“Technically I’m closer to god or an angel than I am to a demon...” The man let out a sigh and moved closer to me. “Anyway, let’s get this over with. Become mine, Shina.” I felt his breath on my neck and the warmth of his skin. Though I’d never seen his face and it had only been a few minutes since we had met, for some reason, I felt

a sense of relief.

Short Story: Ariya and the Cat

I walked down the street with Ariya as we headed to the next store, after having bought a gun and a dagger.

“Ari, could you put that dagger away?”

“Why? It’s perfectly normal for adventurers to be equipped with weapons in town.”

“Yeah, sure...but they don’t clutch their weapons lovingly to their chest like that.”

The way she held it, it was like she was cradling a baby. We were obviously getting a lot of looks. I couldn’t take it. Considering there was mithril in the dagger, it also made me pretty nervous.

“I’m doing no such thing!” she snapped, quickly hiding it behind her.

“Uh-huh. Okay.” As she turned red, I glared at her.

I really had no clue what was going through her head. At least now there weren’t as many people staring at us. We were still getting looks, though, but that was most likely because stories of Black Rose had spread across town. Not-so-great rumors had also spread about me.

As we were looking for the next armory to stop at, we passed by a number of regular shops. Our objective today may have been weapon shopping, but I was interested in the other stores around here as well. We’d never really had the opportunity to check them out since Ariya had been incredibly busy with requests and I’d been busy collecting information. *Yep. I’ve been a busy bee. Definitely not slacking off whatsoever.*

Anyway, after meeting Sister Sensei, I’d begun training with her, so this was probably the first time that I’d been able to leisurely walk the streets with Ariya. It might’ve been a great time to explore other stores too. We’d been working hard. Surely it’d be okay for us to take a break to do some shopping.

That’s enough for excuses. I saw a meat skewer, and I wanted to try it. There was an irresistible smell wafting over from a street stall somewhere. Seriously, it smelled so good. The sizzling fat and the thick glaze combined with the smell of charcoal burning really got my appetite going. I couldn’t hold back anymore.

Maybe I didn’t need to. It’s not like I had to make excuses anymore.

“Hey Ari, wanna try those meat skewers?” I asked.

“Skewers? Oh—from that stall over there? Well, not really—”

“You want to eat them, right?”

“Huh?”

“Of course you do. Right?”

“Uh... Sure. Let’s try them.”

Glad we’re on the same page. I went to the stall and asked for two skewers.

“Oh, you two on a date? I’m jealous!” the guy running the stall said.

It seemed like he didn’t know who we were, or maybe he did and was pretending not to. Either way, he had a nice smile.

“Yeah, great, isn’t it? How about you make one of these a freebie?”

“Shouldn’t you be showing how selfless you are by paying full price?”

“You’re right. On second thought, make hers the freebie.”

“Ha! You’re funny. I’ll give you one extra on the house.”

“So you’re still making me pay for two... Okay, whatever.”

In the end, I got three skewers, and each had five pieces of meat on it. I wasn’t sure what to do with the extra, though. *I guess since I technically paid for it, I should eat it.* So I put one of them in my mouth and returned to Ariya.

“Hey, I’m back,” I said with my mouth full, but Ariya didn’t react at all. She stayed crouching alongside the nearby alleyway.

I wanted to ask her what she was doing, but my mouth was kind of occupied. I used Conqueror on the skewer in my mouth so that it’d float in the air, allowing me to speak. If anyone saw me from the side, it’d look like I was eating a burnt skewer.

“What are you doing, Ari?”

“Oh, Kiri... Wait, what are *you* doing? Why don’t you just hold it with your hand?”

Well, it certainly wasn’t because I wanted to emulate characters in manga who talk with cigars in their mouths. “Here. For you.”

“So I get one and you get two? I see how it is.”

“I’ll give you half of this one if you want it. I just finished the first half, so I could give you the rest. Want it?”

“No!”

Suit yourself. “What’re you looking at?”

“This cat,” Ariya said, looking at a small and kinda chubby brown cat that seemed to have collapsed.

“Looks like it’s alive.” Judging from its stats, it was most likely just sleeping. It wasn’t missing that much HP.

“But it doesn’t seem to be sleeping. Cats wouldn’t sleep in the

shade like this,” Ariya said, reaching over to the cat with the hand that was holding the skewer.

At this, the cat raised its head slightly and its nose twitched.

“Maybe it’s just hungry,” I pointed out.

“Can cats eat this meat?”

“Hm...” Judging from the size of the cat, I doubted it was starving. It probably wasn’t a good idea to give it meat dripping in sauce, though. “Give me your skewer for a sec.”

Ariya nodded and passed it to me. I used Conqueror on it and removed the sauce with Puppet Master, storing it in my Shadow Storage for later. As long as the meat was plain, it was probably okay for the cat to eat.

“Here,” I said, giving it back to her after dispelling Conqueror.

“You really like using your Skills for the most pointless things...”

Ariya took the meat off the skewer and placed it in front of the cat. One might’ve expected it to be a little cautious, but it immediately pounced on the food and ate every last bit of it, leaving absolutely nothing for Ariya. At the very least, though, the cat looked better. It sat and stared at Ariya. *Sorry—if you’re looking for more meat, she’s fresh out.*

“I think this cat belongs to someone,” Ariya pointed out.

“Oh yeah, it’s got a collar.”

It’d been hard to see when the cat had been lying down because its fur covered it, but a red collar was now clearly visible.

The cat let out a ridiculously loud meow.

“I wonder who he belongs to.”

“Who knows? Probably someone around here, right? It’s pretty normal for outdoor cats to roam around like this.”

Even back in Japan, there were lots of cats who’d wander around outside their family’s house. I was sure that it couldn’t have been that strange for cats to exhibit a similar behavior in this world too. The only caveat was that you saw it less often because there were a lot fewer cats here than in Japan.

“But it was so hungry that it collapsed,” Ariya countered. “Maybe it’s lost.”

“Yeah, maybe. Who knows?”

It wasn’t as if either of us could speak cat, so we couldn’t exactly ask it directly. Ariya suddenly perked up as if she’d had an idea. She put her hands around the cat’s upper body and lifted it up, eliciting a loud meow.

“Where do you live?”

“Meooow!”

“What’s your name?”

This was hard to watch. She was talking to it in a sweet voice as if

it could understand her. She was even making sure to speak slowly and clearly enunciate her words. I couldn't see her face since she was looking in another direction, but I was sure that her expression had softened too.

"Hm?" She tilted her head.

As much as I hated to admit this...I found this kind of cute. It was definitely really awkward, though—it felt like I was looking at something that I wasn't supposed to see. More importantly, I'd learned something new about Ariya today. *Never took you for a cat lover. Is it really that cute to you?*

Ariya turned back towards me with a troubled expression. "I'm at a loss. It doesn't seem as if he understands what I'm saying."

"If he did understand what you were saying, I'd start doubting your sanity." And why had she said that with a straight face? *Have you snapped?* "Anyway," I continued, "the cat's owners probably live around here. Maybe the townspeople know something. How about we ask some of the shop owners about the cat as we go? That way we can keep shopping and get it home."

"Good plan. Let's do that." The cat meowed as Ariya held it against her chest but didn't fight back. "Oh, Kiri. Since I gave the cat my skewer, can I have the extra one?"

"Huh?"

"Why's it already in your mouth?!" Ariya exclaimed. She was clearly shocked by my selfishness, but hey, I wasn't the one who'd given their food to a cat. She had nobody but herself to blame.

Still, the way she was looking so longingly at the skewer made me give in. I held out the remainder of the skewer to her. "Want it?"

"No!"

What the hell? You were the one looking at it like you wanted it. "I guess I learned something new about you today, Ari. You like cats, huh?"

"Hm? No, I like dogs too."

I wasn't asking if you're a cat person or a dog person... "Did you ever have a cat?"

"Well, you remember my sister...? She was very impulsive. One day, she'd say she wanted a cat, and then the next, she'd get bored and discard it. I was more or less forced to stop myself from wanting a pet."

I could picture the first princess doing that—it was just like her. She was hot and then cold about a lot of things.

"What about you, Kiri?"

"What *about* me?"

"Don't you think cats are cute? Do you like cats?" She held the cat up to me.

The cat meowed as he was lifted up. “Hm, I’ve never tried one before. Could be tasty,” I said, looking at the cat’s belly.

Ariya immediately pulled the cat back to her chest and turned, as if to hide it from me. She looked back at me, her eyes moist. “Stay away from him, Mr. Meow!”

“You don’t need to hide him; I was just kidding. Don’t give me that look and run off. Also, why are you giving him a name? He’s not your cat.” *Not to mention, that’s kind of a simple name for a cat..*

For the record, I knew what dog...well, I guess, *wolf* blood tasted like. All I meant was that I’d never tried cat blood before. No matter how I tried to reassure Ariya, though, she wouldn’t drop her guard or approach me, so I decided to buy her another skewer.

“Seriously...? That’s not cool, my guy.”

“Bite me. Oh—no sauce, please.”

“Oh my gosh, what a cute cat!”

I was currently in a specific circle of hell, being approached by a middle-aged man with too much makeup on who was eagerly wiggling his butt.

“Cute? You should get your eyes checked,” I scoffed.

“Its ugliness makes it cute!”

Oh yeah—just like the gross-cute trend in Japan. We were currently visiting our second armorer of the day, and it seemed to be run almost single-handedly by a cross-dressing man. At the very least, though, he wasn’t shooting us any dirty looks like the first armorer we went to. Even though his store was smaller, he won out in that regard.

“What’s his name?”

“Mr. Meow,” Ariya responded proudly.

“That’s not his real name,” I chimed in.

Ariya shot me a displeased look and puffed out her cheeks. *Why are you mad? I’m not lying.*

“We don’t know his name. We think he belongs to someone, but we’re not sure who. Have any of you seen him before?”

“Mmm, sorry. I’ve never seen him before. I’m sure I’d recognize this cat in a heartbeat if I had,” said the owner, putting his hand to his chin in thought.

Looks like we’d struck out. Maybe the cat didn’t belong to anyone in these parts. It might really have wandered here from somewhere else far away.

“Oh, I see,” Ariya said, disappointed.

“Sorry I couldn’t help, but can I help you find any weapons?”

“Yeah, let’s have a look,” I said. After all, that had been our primary purpose in coming here. “But first—I’m physically incapable of using magic tools. Do you have anything else I could use, preferably

a sword of some sort?"

"Oh, interesting." At this point, it looked as if dots had connected in his head. That reaction said he must have figured out who I was. He'd probably thought that I was slacking off because I couldn't use magic tools.

"I'm really sorry, but my store specializes in magic tools."

"All good. Sorry to have bothered you. Ariya, anything you want?"

"No, I already have something."

Oh, right, her prized dagger...or, uh, skewer? I'd expected her to be clutching her dagger, but she was currently holding up the skewer, which still had three pieces of meat on it. Apparently, she'd been sharing it with the cat. She was taking forever to get through it.

So with that, we thanked the shop owner again and left. What a character that guy was.

"A cat?"

"Yes. This one right here. Do you recognize him?"

"No!" the kid replied, with a little too much energy.

We were currently at a bakery, and the person at the counter was probably the owner's kid, filling in for them because they'd had to step away from the counter.

If we were to believe the last shop owner's statement, this cat most likely hadn't come from anywhere around here. So we'd decided to spread our search to stores a little farther away. At this point, Ariya finally only had one piece of meat left on her skewer. I suppose I should've been impressed by her technique which allowed her to eat elegantly while still holding the cat, but I honestly would've preferred if she'd prioritized eating it quickly instead.

"Scram." A middle-aged woman with a husky voice and a decent body put herself between me and the kid. From the apron she was wearing, it was a safe guess that she was the shop owner and most likely the kid's mom. "Go play in the back, Kai."

"But mom!"

"Don't 'but mom' me!"

She pushed him into the back of the shop. It seemed as though she really wanted to put some distance between her son and me. She turned back then and leered at me.

"What do you want? If you're not buying anything, get out!" Apparently, she knew who we were.

Ariya looked discouraged, but in the end still managed to ask the woman about the cat. "Sorry, but do you know anything about this cat?"

"No! There's nobody around here who owns one. That all? Good.

Scram!" Sheesh, she was mean. It almost made me think that this was personal. "And don't bring an animal into a place that serves food! The hair's gonna get everywhere!"

Oh, I'm so sorry. I couldn't believe how insensitive we were being. We practically ran out of the store. After that, we continued going to different armorers while asking about the cat, but nobody seemed to know where it had come from.

"What if we never find their owner?" Ariya asked.

"We put it back where we found it, of course."

"Do you want to come home with us, Mr. Meow?"

Nope. Not unless you want me to suck out its blood and turn it into my thrall. A black cat might not have been too bad, though.

The cat meowed again. I really wished I knew what it was thinking.

"Aw, are you hungry? Maybe I should make a basket to carry you around in."

Well, someone was certainly getting way ahead of themselves. But also, after having gone down this entire street, we hadn't found anyone who knew about the cat. We were now nearing the end of the street, which also happened to be the closest point to the town's entrance. That was probably the place where the most people congregated and shopped.

"I wonder if they sell fish here." *Oh god, she's already decided to buy it food.* "What kind of fish do you want, Mr. Meow?"

The cat meowed really loudly. *What the hell? Wait, no—that was a human scream.* A man with a turban ran over to us. Could he have been the owner of this cat?

"Ecatarina! You went off on your own to beg for food?!" The man snatched the cat from Ariya and began happily spinning around with it. If he wasn't careful, his turban was going to unwind.

That ugly cat's name is Ecatarina, though? Seriously? I looked over at Ariya and saw that she was frozen in place, with her arms out as if she were still holding the cat. All she had left was the last piece of meat on her skewer. *How have you not finished that yet?!*

After the owner had finished dancing with the cat, he turned to us and cleared his throat. Then he began spinning in the opposite direction, and somehow his turban rewound itself. *What the hell? Oh crap, this guy is really gonna be a character!*

"I don't know who you are, but thank you! Thank you so much!"

"All good." I answered for Ariya, since she was still frozen in place.

"Let me guess," said the man, "you found him collapsed somewhere around here."

"That's right. Has this happened before to...Ecatarina?"

“Yes. As you can see, I’ve been trying to keep him on a diet, but sometimes he slips away and pretends to collapse in alleys so that passersby will feed him. He usually comes back after he gets his fill...” *Wow, pretty smart cat.* “But I’m a traveling salesman, and this is our first time in this town, so I was worried that he’d gotten lost.” *Or wait, maybe he’s actually dumb?*

As thanks, the man gave me one of his wares for free. And as for Ariya, she didn’t move a muscle until after the guy and his cat were long gone.

“Mr. Meow...”

“Ecatarina, you mean...”

Give it up, Ariya.

One night, Ariya was petting Fenrir, who’d shrunk himself.

“Mr. Meow...” *Ariya, you’re not petting Mr. Meow or even Ecatarina. That’s Fenrir.*

“Masterrr...” Fenrir shot me a concerned look. *Sorry, buddy, can’t help you.*

It’d been a few days since our time with that chubby cat, and Ariya had tried to see if she could find that guy again, but apparently they’d only been passing through Regin. They had no plans to regularly visit. And after learning that fact, Ariya had become like this.

I sighed and took a certain item out of my Shadow Storage, which I put on Ariya’s head.

“Huh?” Ariya touched it and realized that I’d put cat ears on her. “Wh-What is this?!”

“This is what I got from that traveling salesman as thanks. You like cats, right?”

“I like *owning* cats, not *being* one!” she yelled, still wearing them. *Aw, you’re so cute when you yell with cat ears, Ariya.* “Wait, I’ve come up with a great idea.”

“Oh yeah?”

“*You* wear these! Then it’ll feel like we have a really opinionated cat!”

“Okay, now you’ve seriously lost it.”

I had no intention of wearing the cat ears. Though if I did, would I be ugly-cute? Or would I be gross-cute? After that, Ariya fought me to put on the cat ears. Ultimately, she settled for Fenrir wearing them.

I gave Fenrir a guilty look. The wolf looked on the verge of tears as Ariya petted him.

“Masterrr...”

“Yeah?”

“I already have my own animal earsss...”

Having four ears is pretty strange...but Ariya looks happy, so I guess it's okay.

Oversummoned, Overpowered, and Over It! 2 / End

Afterword

Thanks to the publisher, Mag Garden Novels; the illustrator, Tsugutoku; the designers; my editor, 0; and, of course, everyone who purchased the first volume! Thank you all for making the publishing of volume 2 possible!

Also, this series is going to be released as a manga! MAGCOMI will be the publisher, and the art will be done by Mukojima Kamome. Thanks to everyone who's supported the web version as well!

I've also finished volume 3 of the web version. I'm looking forward to writing more of the story. Thank you to the website that let me publish my stories on it, and to all the readers! Please continue supporting me in the future!

Lastly, I'd like to thank a few more things. First—my body that allows me to exist more or less as a human, which consists mostly of the carbonated liquid goodness that is Coke instead of water. Second—my organs that are no longer capable of digesting noodles, excessive caffeine, or fats. Also, thank you to the nutrients that fuel my body: proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, minerals, and others. Thank you to the 35 liters of water, 4 liters of ammonia, 1.5 kilograms of lime, 800 grams of phosphorus, 250 grams of salt, 100 grams of nitrite, 80 grams of sulfur, 75 grams of fluorine, 5 grams of iron, 3 grams of silicon, and small amounts of 15 other elements that make up my body tissue. Thank you to the deoxyribose, phosphoric acid, and bases that make me who I am. Thank you to both oxygen molecules and adenosine triphosphate, which allow me to produce energy through respiration. Thank you to the elementary molecules and the autotrophs that produce the substances necessary for life activities. Thank you to the decomposers, which are critical in the cycle of life. Thank you to the sun, which gave birth to the Earth, the Milky Way galaxy, which houses our solar system, and the vast universe, which houses us all. And a big thank-you to each and every one of you!

"Come on, try
and catch me!"

"H-Huh?"

Ariya tried to grab her,
but grabbed air instead.
It was as if Sylph's body
was a hologram.

Inori Takafuji

17 / Male / Height: 179 cm

The main protagonist. He goes by the name "Kiri" and has a bad reputation as an alcoholic adventurer in Regin.

Sylph

3000(?) / Female / Height: 12 cm

A wind spirit. On the orders of the gods, she attempts to take control of Inori's mind, but...

Ariya

18 / Female / Height: 161 cm

Now a vampire, she serves Inori. She goes by "Ari" in Regin.

Over summoned,
Overpowered,
AND OVER IT! 2

Fanatique Rasshoth

16 / Female / Height: 158 cm

A Holy Knight of the Holy Land of Ryne. She is very experienced with the Holy Knight magic tools and is quite the musclehead.

????

7 / Male / Height: 175 cm

Inori's drinking buddy, whose identity is shrouded in mystery. Who could he possibly be?

"Come on, let's get back to training."

"No! That's not training! It's cruel and unusual bullying!"

As much as I screamed and struggled, the other adventurers didn't move a muscle to help me.

Bonus Short Story

Day Three of Training Hell

The sky and the ground switched places, and I couldn't tell which way was up and which was down. Before I knew it, I had crashed into the ground back-first, knocking all the air out of me. Fortunately, I'd been able to control my fall, so I didn't take any serious damage.

As I rolled around on the ground, Sister Sensei glared at me, the sun framing her as she stood with her arms folded disapprovingly across her chest. It would've been picturesque if it hadn't also been painful.

"After sparring with you for three days, I think I get it now. You're not ready to spar at all yet."

What do you mean, you "get it now"?! This should've been obvious right when we started! I couldn't believe that I'd been forced to spend almost three days like this so she could have this epiphany. I was dead tired. I was pissed. To vent some of this anger, I decided to peek under her clothes as she stood there, lost in thought and defenseless.

Place your bets! Favorite to win is white, followed by black, with the dark horse being purple. I turned my head slowly so that she wouldn't notice.

"You have good eyes, but you're not able to use them." *Damn. So close.* "So let's use this to train." Sister Sensei brought out a ball of water. It looked like there was something inside it, but the light made it hard to see what it was. "This is a sphere of mana-infused water. It's not itself a magic spell, so it won't hurt if it hits you. You'll just get wet."

"Your magic affinity is water?" *If the wind would just blow a little, maybe I could still catch a glimpse...*

"Yeah, but it's not nearly as strong as my light magic." *Oh, it's starting to blow, but the angle isn't good. I need to consider the direction of the wind and adjust my angle appropriately...* "Anyway, I'll fire some of these at you and you're going to dodge them. It should help train your ability to anticipate attacks."

"Uh-huh..." *Just a little further...*

"By the way...what exactly do you think you're doing?" Shooting me an ice-cold glare, she held her skirt down.

At once, I stopped moving. Using Omniscience, I noticed that my head had basically reached a position where I was looking up between

her legs. *Oh. Yeah, no wonder she caught me.* Maybe she'd forgive me if I got on my knees and apologized... Not that I would, though. Instead, I picked myself off the ground, acting as if I'd just woken up from a nap.

"Let's try your training out, then," I said nonchalantly.

"I can't believe how naturally you're acting after all that. Your willpower must be strong if you can pretend you weren't just up to something." *It's about eight otherworld summons strong, actually.* "But it's too late to play dumb, anyway. I knew what you were doing from the start." She exhaled deeply, turned on her heels, and walked a short distance away to begin my training.

It turned out that I'd been playing right into her hand—or legs, I guess—this entire time. Since I hadn't been able to vent my anger with my scheme, I went ahead and used Clairvoyance to look under her skirt anyway. *White, huh? Boring. Called it, though.*

Now that my training hell had turned into playing with water, though, I felt like I'd been freed. However, I was only afforded such naive thoughts for a brief period of time, because...

"Okay, here we go!" she said lightly, before unleashing ten or so water spheres in my direction. It was like an artillery barrage. *How the hell am I supposed to dodge this?!*

"What are you thinking?! You can't shoot that many at once!"

This is supposed to be training my predictive abilities, right? How am I supposed to do that if there is nowhere to dodge? At the very least, though, getting hit would only result in me getting wet. It wasn't that dangerous, but on the other hand... *Is this holy water?*

It didn't seem like normal water. If she'd produced the water herself, then it wouldn't have been too surprising for it to be infused with some holiness. Or maybe she'd infused it with some of her light magic. Either way, getting hit was going to be a big no-no for a vampire like me. Regardless of how dilute it was, holy water was like vampire weakness number one.

I figured getting hit was gonna hurt. Sort of like getting a burn. It wouldn't break the skin or anything, but it'd feel like someone had splashed boiling water on me. *Sounds like torture, actually.* I wasn't about to let it show on my face though, no matter how painful it was...and believe me, it *really* hurt. I needed to pass this training as soon as possible so she'd stop, but the reality was that I wouldn't be finishing anytime soon with how poorly I was doing. I was pretty much getting hit every single time.

"How aren't you getting this yet?" said Sister Sensei, frowning.

"What's there to get?! How am I supposed to dodge all of these when they're all coming at me at the same time? I can't even tell their trajectory or speed."

“What do you mean? Something inside you should stir...like a sense telling you that an attack is coming and you have to dodge. You’ll be able to react to it eventually.” *Uh, what you’re referring to is a sixth sense. That has nothing to do with reactions.* “Listen—you have to connect your senses to your surroundings. Become one with them.”

“You lost me.”

She just wasn’t cut out to be a teacher. She was much better suited to being a hermit or someone that spoke in cryptic riddles. That being said, her explanation gave me an idea. I’d been too focused on anticipating attacks that I’d tunnel-visioned on relying on visual cues and moving my body accordingly.

On the second round, I was able to dodge a few of the water spheres, and by the third attempt, I was able to dodge about half of them. Realizing that I’d gotten the hang of it, Sister Sensei started mixing in some feints as well. By the sixth round, I barely got hit at all.

“Good job, Kiri! How’d you get so good?”

“Rather than making my body move faster, I started focusing on my surroundings.”

Specifically, I looked at our positions, all the possible angles at which she could unleash the spheres, and the direction in which she was looking. Based on these three factors, I was then able to figure out what sorts of attacks were possible. Whenever she tried to feint, it became pretty obvious because the trajectory she seemed to be targeting wasn’t viable.

In essence, I stopped focusing on the movements of her actual body and focused instead on the options which were open to her in relation to my position. If I was able to figure out the angles at which she could attack me, it became simple to predict how she actually would.

This wasn’t the first time I’d employed this strategy—I’d used it even when I fought with Fenrir, using his attack pattern to my advantage in order to lure him into my trap. What I was doing now was a more targeted application of that same strategy. And whether she was aware of it or not, Sister Sensei had been training me to do this continuously in short spurts.

Mastering this skill should’ve been hard for most people, but luckily I had Omniscience on my side, which gave me a bird’s-eye view of the area.

“Well, I guess we’re done with this training now. I didn’t expect you to master it in just a day.”

“Hell yeah.” I was finally free of this boiling water torture. I was so happy, I found myself excitedly clenching my fist in victory.

“Okay, let’s go back to sparring.”

“Huh?”

“What’s with the surprise? That was just regular training. Now we have to put that training to use. Come on, put ’em up.”

Out of the frying pan, into the fire. There was no escape from this hell.



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Oversummoned, Overpowered, and Over It! Volume 2
by Saitosa

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Original Japanese edition published in 2020 by MAG Garden
This English edition is published by arrangement with MAG
Garden
English translation © 2022 J-Novel Club LLC

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Ebook edition 1.0: November 2022
Premium E-Book